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JANET

OR

GLANCES AT HUMAN NATURE.

THE SECOND OF
A SERIES OF TALES ON THE PASSIONS:

BY
THE AUTHOR OF "MISREPRESENTATION."

———And had she then no virtues,
Was she not wise, and chaste, and true?

———Oh no; envy had tainted all:
Like the foul worm that crawls and leaves it soil and noisomeness,
Marring the wholesome fruit.

OLD PLAY.

All Tales should have a moral. A Tale without a moral is just as useless as an
unroofed house—a bankrupt's bond—an M. P.'s conscience—or a fine lady.
M.S.

IN THREE VOLUMES.

VOL. II.

LONDON

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JANET;

OR

GLANCES AT HUMAN NATURE.

CHAPTER I.

WHY are not happy marriages more frequent?—
One, who knew something of human nature—
of its dark shades, at least, would reply by
pointing to that species of conventional hy-
pocrisy modern society imposes on its members.
Nor is he altogether wrong—we are all Auto-
matons, and the springs which move us are
hidden, sometimes, from ourselves; how then
shall others penetrate our secret motives, or

guess them different than our actions would declare?

But it is not only that marriages take place under false impressions; in forming such connexions there is frequently a want of *reciprocal* affection. If there be any love at all in the business (and, by the way, that necessary ingredient to wedded happiness is often omitted altogether) it is all on one side. A man may marry the woman of his choice, or vice versa, but rarely do both consult their inclinations. A girl, whilst still under parental tutelage, refuses or accepts, not as her heart, but, as her friends dictate: and, in later days, when her own mistress, she marries any one who asks her, because, in her buffetings about the world, she has felt the want of a protector—or because, she has not moral fortitude to bear the obloquy of being an old maid. And a man marries from pique—whim—to advance himself in his profession, or—to pay his debts. When, therefore, the doting wife, who finds herself forsaken, rails

at the fickleness of man—it were more just, perhaps, did she suspect that she had never been beloved. And the indulgent husband, whose affection meets with no adequate return, may nearly always be assured that the jewel he vainly seeks to win has long ago been parted with.

To understand the reasons that swayed Mr. Perceval D'Esterre on this occasion, it will be expedient to give a few items of his previous history.

He was an only child : his father, the representative of a highly respectable family, which had resided at Ringland for about a century and a half ; his mother, Lady Gertrude Frampton, eldest sister of the Marquis of Cotswold. It was whispered this high - born dame would scarcely have bestowed herself upon a simple commoner, with but a moderate estate, had she not already reached the shady side of thirty, and consequently saw but little probability of another offer ; for, in those days, “elderly young

ladies" were not so much in vogue as they appear to be at present.

Her probation as a wife was brief: but it may be supposed she gave (as the servants say) satisfaction to her Lord; for on his death, which occurred within three years after the marriage had taken place, he left the lady and her brother, Lord Cotswold, sole guardians to his son, and trustees of the property.

The Marquis proved faithful to his trust: and being an excellent man of business, the estate, unlike the estate of many minors, increased in value, so that when Perceval attained his majority, in addition to an augmented rent-roll, he found himself master of a considerable sum of ready money. Nor was this the only benefit he owed his noble relative. Lord Cotswold, a childless widower, was extremely partial to his nephew, and as it was not generally known that all the Cotswold property was strictly entailed, would, it was thought, leave him some substantial proofs of his regard; and, from this future con-

tingency, Perceval's present importance derived considerable increase. He was now a rich man—hereafter, he would be more wealthy still.

On her side, Lady Gertrude had also done her duty, or, at any rate, what she considered such. She nursed her son carefully through all the disorders of infancy; separated him as much as possible from his less aristocratic relations; instilled into his mind the most exaggerated sense of his own importance; and, from an early age, taught him to consider the attainment of rank, wealth, and fashion, as the chief object of existence. What an education for a rational, immortal being!

Naturally, Perceval was by no means more unamiable or selfish than his neighbours; but how could one, who from his cradle had been led to think only of himself, be otherwise than indifferent to the feelings of those around him? nor might a mind, whose finer sympathies had remained uncultivated, be afterwards expected to shake off its early bias, and shape out for

itself a nobler course, or objects of ambition more exalted. Lady Gertrude wished to see her son a man of fashion; and, more dutiful than sons in general, he fully answered all his mother's rational desires. He became a man of fashion—not of fashionable vices, but of tastes and notions. That ambition which, if well directed, might have grasped distinction in the senate or at the bar, took a far meaner range. He sought to be the best dressed man of his acquaintance—to drive the best appointed equipage—give the best dinners—above all, keep the best company. And, by dint of spending three times the amount of his yearly income, he attained his honourable object; nay more than that—he became himself *the* fashion.

What is fashion?—A sort of epidemic mania, as capricious in its subjects as it is fleeting in its taste. Whizgigs were once the fashion—so was Brummel; shoe-making was considered a fit employment for delicate white hands; and Spanish patriotism was quite the rage: and the

more recent fancies of the fickle goddess have been neither more rational nor lasting. Well—Perceval became the fashion. For two years he occupied the point of highest eminence among the most exclusive persons, and enjoyed all the consequences of that distinction. He was, at once, petted by the young married ladies—admired by the unmarried—adulated by Chaperones—envied by some men—imitated by others.

But this halcyon state of things might not last long. Money was getting scarce, debt became inevitable—sundry exhortations from his lady mother followed, and a few trifling retrenchments were resolved on. From this time his glory faded—his star had reached its culminating point, and now began to wane : it was whispered that, far from being the wealthy person he had been imagined, Mr. D'Esterre was all but ruined ; and those who had before, eagerly, courted his society, now shrunk from his presence. Persons, whom the giddy voice of

fashion has raised above their due level, are usually especially tenacious of their ephemeral distinction. Such had been D'Esterre's case, and it was with infinite mortification he became aware of his declining popularity.

Then the Marquis died, and left no legacy of almost countless wealth. Perceval was not disappointed, for he had never expected any; but his creditors were, and became exceedingly annoying in their solicitations to have their "small accounts" discharged. The Cotswold title and property went to a remote branch of the family, who regarded Perceval merely as a distant connexion, and, far from evincing any wish to cultivate his acquaintance, gave him a cold and very general invitation to Hartingfield.

This was, perhaps, the unkindest cut of all; for with his deceased uncle vanished much of the borrowed distinction he had hitherto enjoyed; and Perceval, the fashionable—the dandified—the exclusive Perceval saw himself fast sinking to the level of a mere country gentleman.

But the case was not altogether hopeless ; a good marriage, that is to say, an alliance with a woman of rank and fortune, would at once rid him of his difficulties, and restore some degree of his former pre-eminence. The measure was resolved upon ; and he, who had formerly been so *volage* in his attachments as to obtain the *soubriquet* of *Papillon*, was henceforth to be considered a marrying man. It was, however, easier to make, than fulfil, this resolution. Mr. D'Esterre's bride, like Lady Kingsbury's house, must combine so many requisites, that such a being was not readily met with. High birth, beauty, accomplishments, and wealth, are rarely united in a single individual ; and when they are, the possessor of so many attractions usually aspires to something beyond a country gentleman. In spite, therefore, of his most laudable intention, notwithstanding the willingness with which his wishes would have been met, and perhaps fore-stalled, by many mamas and daughters, Perceval remained unmarried.

And yet there did exist, not many miles from Ringland either, precisely what he wanted—a lady, young, beautiful, rich, noble, and amiable, of course—all young ladies are amiable. The present Marquis of Cotswold had been twice married: his first lady, a woman of very considerable fortune, died while her three daughters were yet infants; and shortly after, her unmarried sister also died, leaving sixty thousand pounds to be divided between her nieces, in addition to the wealth they were already entitled to in right of their deceased parent. The second girl followed the example of her mother and aunt; the eldest had lately become Duchess of R——; and the Lady Alicia, now just nineteen—beautiful, graceful, and accomplished,—remained to tantalize the gentlemen, and more especially Mr. D'Esterre, who, independent of her more substantial qualifications, considered the young Heiress by far the most attractive being he had ever met with.

Lady Alicia Frampton, however, appeared to

entertain no such favourable impression of him : on the contrary, her manner towards him was as reserved as the Marquis's had been frigid. Indeed, on one memorable evening, when all the fashionable world were assembled at D—— House, and Perceval, hurried on by the admiration he could not restrain, endeavoured to engage his fair relative in conversation, hoping thus to establish something like intimacy between them, Lady Alicia testified her unwillingness so very unequivocally, and lavished the attention he had vainly sought to gain, with such openness upon an exceedingly plain-looking person (a certain Sir Allan Stuart, brother to the present Marchioness), that D'Esterre, vexed and mortified, looked eagerly around in search of some less fastidious fair one, on whom he might bestow the homage thus disdainfully rejected. Janet Irving chanced that night to be in high beauty, and great request amongst the gentlemen ; to her side Perceval attached himself, and, for five or six

weeks afterwards, plied her with assiduities resulting but from pique, and having for their object nothing beyond amusement for the passing hour.

He was decidedly to blame: still, if his conduct were reprehensible, it was not, at any rate, uncommon. Very few men there are who can lay their hands honestly upon their hearts and say—they have never done as much; nor are there, perhaps, many women of sufficient beauty to render them attractive, who have not, at one period or another, found themselves the subjects of unmeaning attentions. Yet, he was wrong—nor may we offer an excuse on his behalf, unless it be the inconsiderate thoughtlessness of his character, joined to the belief that Miss Irving's feelings were by no means compromised. She would, doubtless, have accepted him, if he had asked her, just as she would have accepted any other man of good connexions and reputed fortune, but her affection was altogether silent in the business.

Thus would Perceval have reasoned had he thought at all upon the subject. I am, however, much inclined to think he never gave himself that trouble. But, when a man thus trifles with a woman's feelings, he does not always play the winning game: the hour came when Perceval saw cause to rue his selfish and ungenerous conduct towards Janet Irving.

Towards the close of that season he chanced again to meet his haughty kinswoman, when, prompted either by caprice, or the desire of atoning for her former all but rudeness—she accosted him with a degree of friendliness as remarkable as had been her former coldness. The Marchioness was equally affable and kind; Perceval was reminded of their relationship, reproached with the unfrequency of his visits in St. James's Square—and given to understand, in the most winning manner, that, although Lady Cotswold never saw visitors until two o'clock, a *relative* would always gain admission. Mr. D'Esterre was far from being an ill-tem-

pered man, and he returned home, not only forgiving, but very much enchanted with Lady Alicia Frampton.

Of course, he presented himself the following morning at the house, he was readily admitted, and ushered into the Boudoir of the Marchioness. Here he found both ladies; the younger with a drawing pencil in her hand; the elder, laudably employed in doing nothing. At the conclusion of a long, and, to Perceval, delightful visit, he was asked to dine on the ensuing day; but a prior engagement, which he could not break, obliged him, most unwillingly, to decline the invitation.

“That is very unlucky,” observed the Marchioness, “for we leave town on Monday.”

“But,” replied Lady Alicia, in her softest tone, “Ringland is not far from Hartingfield.”

“And Mr. D’Esterre will make that distance shorter by often riding over,” said the Marchioness.

As may be supposed, Mr. D’Esterre eagerly

expressed his willingness to prove a good neighbour.

“ But, above all,” rejoined Lady Cotswold, you must hold yourself disengaged for the second week in August ; or rather, you must consider yourself engaged to us. We have an archery meeting on the eleventh ; promise you will make one of our party.”

Perceval was only too happy to promise.

The Cotswolds left town—he speedily followed ; and, while Janet relieved the dulness of her life at Atherley with buoyant hope, as groundless as it was natural, her recreant knight was devoting himself entirely to her rival, without lavishing one single thought on her. He was, in fact, completely fascinated ; and, without waiting to inquire what had caused so great and sudden an alteration, gave himself up to a delirium of delight. The Marquis, to be sure, was quite as stiff and disagreeable as before. But what was that to Perceval ? Lady Alicia was all smiles—the Marchioness all consideration—and he, all happiness.

For many years past, nothing so gay and splendid as the Cotswold archery meeting had enlivened ——shire :—rank, beauty, fashion, crowded from a distance, and all the leading people of the county met at Hartingfield. Amidst the throng of young men, thus assembled, still was D'Esterre the favoured cavalier, and, as if to complete his triumph, the hunch-backed Baronet figured amongst the guests, and was treated by Lady Alicia with as much reserve and coldness as it had been formerly his lot to feel.

Perhaps, therefore, it is not wonderful that his brain turned giddy; nor should we marvel very much that, finding himself riding alone by Lady Alicia's side, in a dark shady lane, one glorious afternoon, when the heaven above glowed with the sapphires' hue—and golden beams chequered the velvet sward—glancing now here, now there, as Zephyr wooed the rustling leaves, and they shrunk coyly from the god's approach, Perceval ventured to unfold his love—his hopes—his fears.

The lady was excessively surprised, vexed, and obliged—had no expectation of anything of this nature; was grieved at the pain she caused him, but hoped they might always remain friends and good neighbours; then, putting her steed into a canter, joined the rest of the party who were a few yards in advance. The discomfited D'Esterre would gladly have turned his horse's head and galloped home, but such a proceeding would have rendered his defeat too public; nothing therefore remained but to follow her example. The Marchioness made room for him, and, during the remainder of the ride, which was the most unpleasant he had ever taken, addressed her conversation almost exclusively to him. Still there was something in her manner that assured him she guessed all that had taken place—and he could not but fear that, ere many hours had passed over their heads, the remainder of the party would be equally enlightened—and they, in their turn, would retail the interesting piece

of gossip, until the whole county would be informed of it. A prospect no man would relish—and, to one of Perceval's peculiar turn of mind, most excessively unpleasant.

Thus was Perceval rejected; and two months afterwards, a slow consent was wrung from the reluctant Marquis to his daughter's marriage with Sir Allan Stuart.

"Why," said Miss Whishart to Mrs. Brenton, one of those unfortunate beings—poor relations, who lived a good deal with the Cotswolds, when they were at Hartingfield; and at other seasons made herself elsewhere welcome by imparting family chit-chat; "I thought Sir Allan Stuart was refused last year?"

"And so he was. The Marquis would'nt hear of it; and the only wonder is how the matter was ever brought on again. What took place in London, I know nothing about, but it's my firm belief, Sir Allan would never have been at that archery meeting, if Lady Alicia Frampton had not appeared so entirely taken up with Mr. D'Esterre."

“ Then, in fact, *he* was made a tool of. Served to blind Lord Cotswold?”

“ Exactly.”

“ What a strange taste Lady Alicia must have, that, amongst all her admirers, she should fix upon so odd a looking person as Sir Allan?”

“ Oh, he’s immensely clever — the most delightful companion. Crooked people, you know, frequently are. Besides, he’s own brother to the Marchioness, and between you and me, Lady Alicia is completely under Lady Cotswold’s influence.”

“ And, to judge by the event, Lady Cotswold seems to have used that influence with an entire view to her family interests.”

“ What can you expect from a step-mother? However, she’s not so much to blame here. Sir Allan is a very amiable man, so Lady Alicia may be happy with him, if she chooses.”

Although Perceval’s attachment had been of too recent a date to affect his peace of mind materially, he felt his discomfiture with keen-

ness ; while the publicity attending his miscarriage added not a little to his mortification ; and, partly to get away from the scene of his failure, until the nine days' wonder should be past and gone—partly to escape the wearying condolences of Lady Gertrude, he betook himself to Eastbeach. There, as the reader is aware, he again met Miss Irving, and, after some slight shew of reluctance, was by her beguiled into a renewal of their former intimacy. But watering-places are the very last places where such proceedings pass unnoticed—a match between Mr. D'Esterre and Miss Irving became the current rumour of the day—and Perceval thought it high time to make his retreat.

He returned to Ringland, and, through Lady Kingsbury's skilful misrepresentation, his flight was construed into an evidence of defeat.

CHAPTER II.

SINCE her husband's death, and latterly, not altogether to her son's satisfaction, Lady Gertrude D'Esterre had resided about half a mile from Ringland. She was a person whose naturally narrow capacity had become even more confined by her association with only two or three chosen companions, whose age and opinions corresponded with her own. She never read—she talked all day—she rarely imbibed a fresh idea, but when she did, it was like a cat with a mouse—a child with a new toy; not for one instant would she let it rest, however trifling

the subject, she could think of nothing else, and, however unpalatable to her auditors, no other topic was allowed to pass her lips. She was a small, spare woman, with a sharp nose, and piercing light grey eyes—a thin, wiry voice, which grated sadly on the ear, and well nigh threw her listeners into a nervous fever.

“Ah, Perceval, I’m glad you’ve come in; it was getting so late, I was afraid you would go straight home without calling to-day, and I want particularly to speak to you. Sit down and tell me what’s the meaning of this paragraph in the ——shire Mercury. I’ve been puzzling over it all the morning, and can’t in the least make it out; so it is really very fortunate you have called. I’m sure I couldn’t have slept for anxiety—do tell me what it all means. And who is Lady K—b—y? stay, I will read it to you. But would it not be better to send away your horse, and dine with me?”

Perceval rang the bell. It was late; he was hungry; and he knew by the expression of his

worthy mother's countenance that, whatever might be the nature of the mystery at present weighing on her mind, the discussion would prove lengthy.

“Now,” said Lady Gertrude, when the servant had received his instructions, and shut the door; “do tell me what all this can mean? Where is it?—oh, here.” Then, in a cracked, discordant voice, she read aloud, as follows:—
“‘Rejected addresses—second edition. Cœlebs has been again unlucky. P*r**v*l D'E*t***e, Esq., whose assiduities towards the fair daughter of the house of C**s***d have rendered him so remarkable in the county, has once more proved himself an unsuccessful wooer. The object of his admiration, one of the lovely nieces of Lady K****b**ry, at present sojourning at Eastbeach, is, we understand, possessed of considerable fortune, in addition to her other numerous attractions. Another time, we should advise Mr. D'E*t***e, who is, we believe, a harmless, well-disposed young gentleman, to

look before he leaps.' Now," continued Lady Gertrude, "what *can* all this mean?"

"It means," replied her son, with more warmth than he usually displayed, "that the Editor of that paper is either a fool or a liar ; a fool, if he believes so ridiculous a report ; a liar, if he circulates what he knows to be untrue."

"That's just what I thought, when I found, after counting the stars and the letters, that the paragraph must apply to you. I said it must be false, for Perceval would never be so foolish as to commit himself again so soon. But what must be done?"

"Nothing."

"Nothing ! then everybody will believe the report."

"If they do, it is of little consequence ; I don't care two straws what they believe," said D'Esterre ; looking and feeling excessively annoyed.

"Well, I think it ought to be contradicted ;

and I have been drawing up a letter, which I thought of sending to the Editor of the Mercury—see, if you approve of it.”

“I think it will be better to take no steps whatever in this matter. If left to itself, the subject will drop to the ground.”

“But, in the meantime, every body will believe you have been again refused.”

“Let them,” replied Perceval, offering his arm to conduct his mother to the dining-room.

“But,” pursued Lady Gertrude, when their silent meal was ended, and the servants had withdrawn, “what I can’t understand is, how such a paragraph ever got into the newspaper at all.”

“It got in, because Mr. ——, whatever is his name, chose to insert it. There are some people in this world who are never happy but when they are inventing, or retailing, lies.”

“And is it, really, quite unfounded?”

Mr. D’Esterre replied by helping himself to wine.

"You know, Perceval, there is always some foundation for every report."

"I will thank you for some of those dried cherries. Have you heard lately from Scotland?"

"I had a letter from my sister this morning—they are all quite well. But to return to our subject. Why should the Editor of the Mercury have fixed upon you in particular; I'm really very much afraid—"

"Isn't that rain?"

"Very likely; the weather has been threatening all the afternoon, and I did not leave home in consequence."

"Pearson tells me rain is greatly wanted."

"I dare say. The farmers are always wanting something," replied Lady Gertrude; and then, returning to her predominant idea, peered into her son's face, as she enquired what sort of people the Kingsburys were?

"Lady Kingsbury is pretty much what all women of her age and standing in society

are. And her nieces — faith, I hardly know what to say of them.”

“Then I suppose you were not very intimate ; it’s really very strange such a report should have arisen.”

In his inmost heart, Perceval found himself compelled to acknowledge it was not so very strange.

“Was there anybody at Eastbeach that you knew besides these Kingsburys?”

“There were some men there of my acquaintance. And I believe our neighbours the Davenports arrived two or three days before I left it.”

“And they returned home last week,” rejoined Lady Gertrude, looking remarkably knowing.

When Perceval entered the room after dinner, he found his sapient mother poring over the newspaper.

“I am looking,” she said, “to see whether there is anything further about that report.

It really is very extraordinary how it got into the paper at all; and just as unlucky as if it had been true. You will gain the credit of having been refused, and that may prove a serious drawback on any future occasion. No girl of any degree of consequence would choose to marry a man who had been twice rejected in so short a time. I knew a gentleman once, who was called the *solicitor general*, only because he made one or two unfortunate proposals."

Perceval stirred the fire, at the same time thinking that if there be in the world one thing more tiresome and provoking than all the rest—it is a curious old woman.

"Did you say there were two Miss Kingsburys?" asked Lady Gertrude, her curiosity and suspicions forcibly awakened by D'Esterre's evident indisposition to enter upon the subject. "Did you say there are two Miss Kingsburys?"

"There are no Miss Kingsburys at all. The young ladies in question are daughters of a sis-

ter of the late Baronet's; she was twice married. First, to a gentleman of the name of Irving, and afterwards to a Major Berrington, who is still alive."

"Berrington, Berrington?" cried Lady Gertrude, "what Berrington? there are two families of that name; both, however, probably originally the same; does Lady Kingsbury's niece belong to either of them? you know who I mean; Sir William Twisden married on daughter—Staffordshire people. Do you think Lady Kingsbury's niece is related to them, or to the Cornwall Berringtons?"

"To neither, I imagine. For, unless my memory deceives me, her father's place is in one of the northern counties."

"Is he a man of fortune?"

"I hardly know."

"He resides on his property?"

"Yes; I remember Lady Kingsbury saying Major Berrington has not quitted home for years; is, in fact, quite a recluse."

“Do you know the name of his place?”

“The Grange.”

“Some fine old family place, I suppose,” observed Lady Gertrude.

“Perhaps so; but I really know nothing about it, excepting that, as I told you, Major Berrington leads a very retired life with his only child.”

“An *only* child?”

“So I was informed.”

“What sort of a girl?”

“Exceedingly handsome. Indeed, promises to be a splendid woman,” replied Perceval, with a degree of animation which did not escape his mother.

“And well educated?”

“Her singing is exquisite; at least, so I thought, the only time I had an opportunity of judging. What Miss Berrington may be in other respects, it is not easy to determine, for she is excessively shy, and, unlike the generality of girls, makes no display. But, you

know, intellectual acquirements are the last points on which we have cause to doubt, in these days, when every woman is like a walking library."

"Beautiful, modest, accomplished, and wealthy," said Lady Gertrude, in a slow, enumerating manner.

"We know nothing of the wealth," replied Perceval, smiling.

"If she be the only child of a man of landed property, she must have some, if not a handsome, fortune."

"True," replied Perceval.

"Does she appear amiable?"

"Very. I should think the sweetness of her temper rarely equalled."

"Just the sort of person I should like for a daughter-in-law," thought Lady Gertrude. "I suppose, Perceval, you saw a great deal of Miss Berrington?"

"No; I rather avoided her society."

"Why?"

“Because she is precisely the girl a man would be likely to fall in love with. And I have no intention again of making a fool of myself.”

“Ah, what a pity it is you were so precipitate in that business of Lady Alicia’s. If you had only waited for my advice—”

“Good night,” said Perceval, quickly.

“Going already?” said Lady Gertrude, in amazement; “won’t you have some coffee? and it rains, I’m sure it rains—Perceval, do stay, and I will order the coffee immediately. Perceval, Perceval—”

But the slamming of the hall-door was Perceval’s only answer; he was, in truth, thoroughly annoyed; and walked home regardless of the rain, the wind—of everything but his vexation.

“I think I should like that Miss Berrington very much—I’ve no doubt she would make an excellent wife—just such an one as I did—I wish Perceval would marry her,” soliloquized

Lady Gertrude, when she had recovered the abruptness of her son's departure.

It was some little time before Mr. D'Esterre succeeded in effecting an entry into his house ; and then he found the window-shutters still unclosed, and the fire in the library nearly out. In fact, he was not expected home at so early an hour ; the housekeeper was drinking tea with a friend in the village, and the other servants thought it far more expedient to attend to their amusement than their duty. He drew his chair towards the fire-place, and remained for some time meditating on the discomfort of bachelor establishments, and the vexations to which single gentlemen, who choose to amuse themselves as he had done, are liable. Then ordered coffee — but, as Mrs. Thompson was absent, the order was in vain.

“Very provoking, this !” he exclaimed, after ringing the bell for the third time, and receiving the same answer to his demand that had been previously given.

“The coffee will be ready immediately, sir,” the servant said; which meant as soon as the important Mrs. Thompson should have been hunted to her post.

“Monstrous provoking! not to be borne with. I must look out for another housekeeper. Mrs. Thompson has been here too long.” He took up a book—read for half an hour, and, having at length succeeded in procuring some black, muddy-looking coffee, went shivering to bed.

CHAPTER III.

MR. D'ESTERRE passed a most remarkably uncomfortable night; he had, at one time, the night-mare; at another, in his dreams he was pursued from place to place by Lady Kingsbury and Mr. Horace Smith, holding each other hand in hand. He fell down a precipice—he was killed in a duel; and every-where those onerous words — “Rejected addresses,” were before his eyes. He had, in fact, taken cold, and the next day was seriously indisposed, ordered to be blooded and keep his bed, at the foot of which, Lady Gertrude, accompanied by a large basket of wor , established herself.

This was the worst of all. Lady Gertrude, disagreeable any-where, was positively unbearable in a sick room; and as, in a more cracked and discordant tone of voice than usual, she descanted on her son's twofold imprudence in catching cold and flirting with Janet Irving, Perceval's nervous irritability rose to an almost ungovernable pitch. And here, be it remarked that even a hint at the wrong he had committed in trifling with another never escaped Lady Gertrude; nor did she evince much commiseration in his present suffering; but for the consequence to himself, he might have broken Janet's heart without in any measure rousing his mother's indignation; and as for his illness—it appeared something to complain of, not to pity. There is very little real sympathy in this world.

“ I really think,” said the tiresome old woman, after about two hours' talking on the very disagreeable theme: “ Perceval, I really think, it's a great pity you did not select Miss Berrington, instead of her sister: I wish you had, Perceval.”

“ Why ? ” said Perceval querulously, as he flung himself round and tried to interpose the pillow between his ear and his mama’s inharmonious voice. “ Why, in the name of wonder, do you wish that ? ”

“ Because you might have become seriously attached to her. It certainly is to be desired that you should marry, and she seems just the sort of girl to suit you.”

“ Perhaps, she would not have had me.”

“ Very unlikely indeed ; ” (and so, to say the truth, thought Perceval too) “ there is a wide difference between the daughter of a country gentleman who has lived all her life in retirement, and Lady Alicia Frampton. What are you going to do ? Why do you ring the bell ? Do you want any thing ? ”

“ I shall get up.”

“ Get up, my dear Perceval ? You forget Mr. Cookham desired particularly——”

“ It matters not ; I can bear this no longer.”

Perceval, however, gained but a short respite

by his disregard of Mr. Cookham's injunction. After spinning out his toilet to the utmost, he found himself once more exposed to Lady Gertrude's tormenting discourse. He tried to read, but his head ached—his eyes watered ; the book was thrown aside. Lady Gertrude offered her services ; Perceval, glad to be rid of her conversation on any terms, assented. His mother folded her work with the greatest precision, drew her spare figure up to its utmost, cleared her throat several times, and then, in the shrillest tone, commenced reading a description of the transports of an accepted lover. After a quarter of an hour's endurance, Perceval's patience was fairly exhausted, and he declared he must return to bed.

"I thought so ; I knew it would be so ;" said Lady Gertrude, as she left the room. "Watson, let me know as soon as your master is settled."

"What a confounded bore my mother is," said Perceval that night, when, at length,

Lady Gertrude had taken her final departure ; and then, not altogether unnaturally, considering the topic of that days' conversation, he thought of Georgina, and, in imagination, her soft dark eyes, so shy, yet so expressive, timidly met his ; her buoyant footstep traversed the apartment ; above all—her sweetly modulated voice fell in melodious tones upon his ear.

“ It would be something to be nursed by such a being as that ;” said he, as he turned himself round to sleep, and, thanks to a soothing draught, slept well, and dreamed of Georgy Berrington.

The following day found Perceval D'Esterre better ; but Mr. Cookham still prescribed confinement, draughts, &c. Lady Gertrude was again at her post enacting the nurse ; and as Perceval resolutely refused to keep his bed or room, she pursued him about the house with a yellow bandana silk handkerchief in one hand, and a bottle of medicine in the other, entreating him to remember Mr. Cookham's injunctions.

In the many delinquencies of her son's house-keeper, Lady Gertrude discovered, however, a fresh and fruitful theme for conversation ; and as Perceval's reception at home, two evenings back, was still fresh on his mind, he entered upon the subject with sufficient readiness.

" Yes," pursued her Ladyship, " your household wants regulation sadly ; that Mrs. Thompson is, as I always thought her, a very good-for-nothing person, and I have no doubt it is to her extravagance and mismanagement you owe much of your present embarrassment. Depend upon it, she cheats you finely."

" Very likely," replied her son.

" Of course, you mean to dismiss her."

" If I did," said Perceval, who hated the trouble of changing a servant ; " I suppose I should be no better off. All servants are the same ; at least all bachelors' servants. With a female head, the household might go on better ; but, it will be some time, I fancy, before Ringland receives a mistress."

“You mean to say that you have no serious thoughts of marrying?”

“None,” rejoined Perceval, although he had entertained ideas of the kind very frequently that morning, and more than once had solaced himself during his mother’s long harangue with contrasting her voice with Georgina’s dulcet tones—her sharp and peevish mouth and chin, with Georgina’s deep red lip and radiant smile.

“Well;” observed Lady Gertrude, looking almost pleased, “if that be really your determination, I have less hesitation in proposing a scheme that occurred to me last night, which will, I think, prove highly advantageous to you.”

“What is that?” asked Perceval, languidly.

“That we should live together.”

“Live together!”

“Yes. You know my term is out in March, and from that time nothing would be easier than to throw our establishments into one. I should,

of course, contribute towards the general expenditure, and the advantage of an experienced head to the ménage will be incalculable. I dare say you would live for half the expense you do now."

"I thought you intended to settle in Edinburgh?"

"I did think of it, to be near my sister. But you are, and ever will be, my first object."

"I have half resolved upon shutting up Ringland for a couple of years, and spending that time abroad."

"Well, that need not interfere with our living together; I should enjoy the change. People may live very economically on the continent; but to make it answer, you must stay, at least, three years. But, when once across the channel, one, two or three, or even four years, would be all the same to me. This summer we might spend at Brientz, or some other quiet part of Switzerland; and we might winter at Rome, or Naples, as we felt disposed. The

Davenport was abroad last year, and rented a small place at Lausanne; living is very cheap in Switzerland."

Perceval was aghast! The idea of spending a summer shut up with his wearisome mother in a Swiss Cottage—of being dragged over the continent chained to her chariot-wheels, even to have her established a constant inmate at Ringland would be beyond the power of human patience to endure—yet, how avert this terrible infliction—what method was there of escaping so obnoxious an expedient? Lady Gertrude was not a person to be easily shaken off—like Sinbad's man of the sea, it was impossible to move her.

Indeed, when a woman once sets her heart upon accomplishing any particular fancy she usually succeeds. Mr. D'Esterre neither loved nor revered his mother; yet, from long habit and early association, he was considerably under Lady Gertrude's influence.

In all domestic matters, women have far

more influence than men; this may seem strange, since the reins are, or ought to be, in the hands of the most powerful. It is, however, very certain that the females of a family can, and do, control, lead, aye, and govern, their liege lords; while they themselves continue to go their own way. One reason may be that *their* weapons are numerous, whilst, on the other side, there is not much beyond authority and superior judgment. For persuasion, men have not patience; besides, persuasion is beneath the stately dignity of man—they may, certainly, advise; but few people listen to opinions adverse to their wishes; and power is a means they seldom like to use.

But woman — dear little, lecture - loving woman, with her weak head and clinging heart, has a thousand ways of gaining her point. She can teaze, she can coax, she can pout; or, like Lady Gertrude, talk her adversary over. Like the mouse in the fable, if she have but patience still to nibble on, she will at last succeed; one

after another, the meshes will give way, and her object be obtained. Men have, besides, if I may use the term, a sort of moral fear of women; perhaps it is a lingering beam of chivalry's bright day. Not many years ago, during the holding of a court martial in this neighbourhood, the unfortunate being, whose conduct was the subject of inquiry, is said to have exclaimed, "I can bear anything but the jeering of the women." That night the wretched man destroyed himself. Yes—woman's influence is great indeed. Why does she so rarely use the talent thus committed to her charge, for ends more noble and exalted than the advancement of her own wishes—the gratification of her selfish whims?

For about half an hour Lady Gertrude continued to dilate on the advantages of her scheme, and Perceval to ponder how it might be evaded without a downright quarrel. At last, in a fit of perfect desperation, he betook himself to his dressing-room, and, having

locked the door, penned the epistle which created so much sensation at Atherley, and determined Georgina's destiny for life.

"There," said he, folding his dispatch, "if I am accepted, there is an end of my mother's abominable plan; the lie will be given to this confounded report, and I shall gain one of the handsomest girls in England for a wife. If I'm refused, there will be no great reason to complain — seeing I have never taken much trouble to make myself agreeable to Miss Berrington."

On re-considering the subject, Mr. D'Esterre remained satisfied with the path he had chosen: even on the score of money, he felt little uneasiness; for Lady Kingsbury, according to her usual habit, had spoken in glowing terms of Major Berrington's place; even Janet, hoping by her discretion to forward her own interests, had carefully concealed her sister's slender circumstances. It was true, estates are frequently entailed on the male heir. Perceval

remembered this, and felt a qualm. It was also true there had been at Eastbeach a report of a pre-engagement; this too occurred to Mr. D'Esterre's mind, and his courage failed; but at that moment Lady Gertrude came, for the third time, rattling at the door, full of anxiety to know, "whether he wanted anything?" His resolution instantly returned, and having added a postscript, begging Major Berrington would destroy, instead of delivering the enclosed letter, should Miss Berrington's affections be in any measure compromised, he hastily sealed the packet, and delivered it in charge to Watson.

"What's that?" asked Lady Gertrude, who took advantage of the unlocked door to effect an entrance. "What's all that, Perceval?"

"A letter to my upholsterer," replied her son.

"A double letter?"

"Yes; he has thought proper to overcharge me for the dining-room tables, and I am

sending back his account to have the error rectified. Watson, let it be put at once into the letter bag."

"Yes, Sir," answered Watson, carefully concealing the superscription of the packet from Lady Gertrude's scrutinizing glance.

The answer was, and was not, satisfactory. Whilst, on the one hand, Mr. D'Esterre's vanity was gratified by Georgina's acceptance of his offer, on the other, his prudence became alarmed: for Major Berrington, after stating that, upon his demise, Georgina would succeed to all he possessed, regretted his total inability to make her, at present, the most trifling allowance.

What the *all* would amount to was not mentioned; for it never occurred to Major Berrington, whose life had been for many years nothing but a long race with poverty, that any one could suspect him of being otherwise than poor. Perceval felt uneasy and dissatisfied, but he had gone too far to recede with honour.

He consoled himself, therefore, with the reflection that, though not wealthily endowed, Georgina was a very lovely creature, and that in marrying her he should become the husband of one of the most beautiful women in the country. Besides, Major Berrington had mentioned difficulties, and it did not follow these would last for ever; all landed proprietors are liable at times to be hampered in their means; it was, at any rate, quite evident no entail existed — Georgina would eventually succeed to the estate. And, having come to this conclusion, Perceval, with his wonted thoughtless extravagance, gave orders for new furniture and additional servants.

During D'Esterre's visit to Atherley, that visit which so speedily taught him the folly of his precipitate proposal, Lady Gertrude was not inactive. Informed of the successful issue of the negociation, and little guessing its monetary drawback, she became confident her son was on the eve of forming a most advan-

tageous marriage; and, in the elation of her spirits, mentioned the auspicious circumstance to a confidential friend, who, of course, repeated the information; and, by the time Perceval returned to Ringland, it was currently reported and believed, throughout the neighbourhood, that he was on the point of marrying a beautiful girl of large fortune, from the north of England; where, I know not why, girls of large fortune are usually supposed to be more abundant than elsewhere—and Mr. D'Esterre received from all sides friendly congratulations on an engagement he would have been only too happy to break off.

There are some men who would have contrived to manœuvre themselves out of the scrape, and so, perhaps, would Perceval D'Esterre have done (fully aware as he was that Georgina's affections could not be deeply engaged), but for the risk of incurring the ridicule of a three-fold failure. This his sensitive vanity forbade—and thus, rather than submit to

a temporary mortification, he persevered in the engagement; and, after giving a few additional instructions to the servants, he betook himself to the metropolis, under pretence of directing the settlements, but in reality to escape his mother's inquisitiveness, and the ill-timed felicitations of his friends and acquaintance.

That an engagement thus hastily contracted would prove the prelude to a happy union was exceedingly problematical; for, to say nothing of her being portionless, Georgina Berrington was one of the last women in all England Mr. D'Esterre should have selected for his wife. He should have chosen a well-bred, highly-connected girl, who had mixed in society—whose habits and opinions were, like his own, formed by the data of the fashionable world; above all, he should not have singled out the sister of a woman whose affections he had won, and thrown away. This latter circumstance it was that most materially threatened the happiness of the newly-married pair: for, though as

yet Perceval might not be said to love, hardly, indeed, to prefer, his young wife, it was not possible he could long remain untouched by so much beauty and sweetness—while she, gentle and affectionate, by no means destitute of talent, would speedily have become moulded to the wishes of a husband she was intently desirous to please.

The marriage, as our readers are aware, took place. Georgina was conducted to her future home; and the neighbourhood, nearly fevered with impatience to become acquainted with the chosen of the fastidious, the elegant D'Esterre, beheld a shy, retiring, almost awkward country girl. For Georgina's timidity, be it understood by all, was real, bona fide, shyness: not such as we sometimes find described in books, where the heroine, all shrinking bashfulness—all retiring modesty, can yet discourse on any given topic with coolness and precision; and, although nurtured in the utmost seclusion, never fails to conduct herself with as much dignity and

grace, and self-possession, as though she had been bred within the precincts of a Court. Such was not Georgina's case; hers was that feeling which unsettles the complexion, gives an uneasy restraint to the movements, and, above all, renders intercourse with strangers a painful and difficult effort.

Poor Georgina's début in —shire was anything but triumphant; and, as if to throw her more completely into the shade, a few weeks after her marriage with Perceval, Lady Alicia Stuart, who had also recently become a wife, arrived on a visit to her father, the Marquis of Cotswold. Although, strictly speaking, Georgina was infinitely the handsomest, the contrast between the two brides was exceedingly disadvantageous to her; with the exception of one or two male connoisseurs who looked only to *beauty*, all the votes were in favour of the high-born, fashionable, well-dressed, Lady Alicia; and Perceval, ever swayed by public suffrage, became daily more dissatisfied with his hastily-

formed union, and less inclined to view with indulgence any trifling infringement of the rules of etiquette of which Georgina might be guilty.

She, quick-sighted and apprehensive, as the timid always are, soon became aware of what was passing in his mind, and henceforth the affection she entertained towards her husband was darkened by mistrust—embittered with anxiety. She had never been quite at her ease with Perceval; now, she absolutely feared him, and became, in consequence, while in his presence, twenty times more nervous and embarrassed than before. Even their tête-à-tête evenings were not exempt from this uncomfortable state of feeling; she dared not enter into conversation, sometimes hardly to walk across the room, and never opened the piano but with trembling, lest he should ask for some song or piece of music, of which, perhaps, she did not even know the name.

In every respect Georgina's excessive bashfulness operated unfavourably; for Perceval

could not but perceive how great was the deference she felt towards him; and it did not tend to raise her in his estimation. A woman should be obedient, gentle, willing to sacrifice her wishes to those of her legal master. But let her not be servile; she will reap nothing by undue submission, except, perhaps, contempt. As Rebecca very truly said, few men act generously towards their wives; and, if a man sees reason to believe *his* is ready to submit to every thing, it is more than probable he will prove a tyrannical or careless husband. The latter was Perceval's bias, for he was not naturally either ill-tempered, or ill-natured.

I hope my readers estimate my candour and fair dealing. Not many pages back I said a few words on the abuse of female influence, and now the gentlemen have had their turn.

CHAPTER IV.

IF, in the sentiments Georgina entertained towards her husband, it were impossible to say whether fear or love predominated, his mother speedily became an object of unmitigated dread to her ; for Lady Gertrude D'Esterre was neither long in discovering that, excepting in gentleness of disposition, Georgina was anything but the daughter-in-law she would have selected, nor backward in testifying to the inoffensive young creature how unwelcome an addition to the family she was reckoned. And, though Lady Gertrude had been so strenuous in advising the match, and so instrumental in

goaded her son into the engagement, she now chose to consider it as having emanated from himself alone; and took every opportunity of lamenting the unfortunate entanglement into which his rashness had plunged him, and of magnifying the disadvantages of the connexion.

“Really,” she said, one afternoon, when Perceval had called to make a visit of dutiful enquiry, “really, it is very extraordinary you should have been so taken in? A girl without fortune, without even the education of a lady—and, as for her connexions, I have questioned her very closely, and, besides these Kingsburys (who, after all, are no great things), I can hear of nothing but Rockets and Flagges. Why, my dear Perceval, I think you must have taken a wife from the arsenal at Woolwich. Are you quite certain,” continued her Ladyship, with a look of mysterious intelligence, for a new idea and very sapient notion just then darted into her brain, “are you quite certain that this is the Miss

Berrington you met at Eastbeach—Sir William Kingsbury's niece? I can't help thinking you must have made some very strange mistake, and got yourself married to a country cousin, instead of the girl you meant. Perceval, are you quite sure this is the right Miss Berrington?"

Perceval vouchsafed no reply to this aspersion on his power of discrimination, but assured his mother that, although there was a cousin of the name of Rocket, Georgina was guiltless of having a relation bearing the other warlike denomination.

"Well, but Rocket, Rocket; who can the Rockets be—and what sort of people are they?"

"There is but one that I ever heard of," replied her son; "and she was certainly not very *distinguée* in appearance or manner. But why should you care what relations Georgina has? They live at an immense distance, and you, at any rate, are not likely to come in contact with them."

“What is to prevent their coming here?” asked Lady Gertrude.

“I see nothing to bring them. They are not near relations; and, to judge by their ideas and appearance, have vegetated, and will continue to vegetate, in their native village, as long as they live.”

“Her father, I suppose, at all events, we must expect to see,” said Lady Gertrude, with an expression almost of nausea.

“He is a great invalid and recluse, and, excepting to church, never goes beyond the boundaries of his own garden.”

“Well, I’m sure, I hope he’ll keep there.”

Perceval silently acquiesced in that hope.

“Then,” resumed Lady Gertrude, “such clothes as she wears! would you believe it, Parkins tells me she is certain they were bought in Cranbourne Alley, or some equally vulgar place.”

“I think Mrs. Parkins would do well to attend to the duties of her situation as your

housekeeper, instead of troubling her head about my wife's wardrobe ; and, before we criticise, it may not be amiss to remember that, if Mrs. D'Esterre's dress is too plain and simple for her station in life, it is, at any rate, economical ; and, to a man in my circumstances, a wife of inexpensive notions may, perhaps, prove a more valuable acquisition, even though she be portionless, than one with large fortune, and ideas and habits of corresponding magnificence."

"Aye," said Lady Gertrude, "that 's all true enough ; but wait till Georgina gets to town. I'm very much mistaken if, when she sees how other young women contrive to ruin their husbands, she does not take advantage of the lesson."

"I do not think she will. Georgina is both sensible and well-disposed ; and is certainly too timid, and anxious to please me, to run the risk of incurring my displeasure."

"And is it by your express orders that, if I

chance to call before luncheon, I invariably find ‘Miss at her studies?’” enquired Lady Gertrude, exceedingly provoked on finding her son persisted in defending his wife.

“Not by my orders; I have never spoken to her on the subject. But, surely, there is nothing reprehensible in a young woman thus employing her leisure hours. In our days literature is a fashionable pursuit—all women read.”

“Yes; but I imagine their reading is of a very different description from that which occupies Mrs. D’Esterre. I found her the other day puzzling over Tasso, with a dictionary on one side, and a manuscript book on the other, in which she carefully noted all the hard words as she looked them out, just like a girl of twelve years old.”

“Georgina has not enjoyed all the advantages many girls receive.”

“No,” replied Lady Gertrude, laughing; “she has not, indeed. And I have half a

mind when next I write to Scotland, to ask my sister whether her late governess has got a situation; I think a few months of her tuition would be a great advantage to Mrs. D'Esterre—and she might pass as a friend, or companion, or even a relation."

"Good morning," said Perceval starting up. "Can I do anything for you in S——?"

"Are you going so late?"

"The trustees of Winsley's school dine together to day: I, you know, am one of them."

"Then Mrs. D'Esterre may as well dine with me, and she can read aloud to me in the evening; she doesn't read aloud badly, and I want to get on with this book."

"Georgina is not well enough to venture out."

"Not well; anything of consequence? I hope she hasn't habitual bad health. Has she seen Cookham?" Asked Lady Gertrude, in some trepidation, lest, in addition to her other delinquencies, Georgina should prove likely to

increase her son's expenses by an Apothecary's bill; or, what would be worse, become the mother of a numerous family.

"Merely a cold."

"A cold: oh, then, I must go and look after her. You know I am famous for nursing colds."

"You managed mine admirably!" Thought her son, as he left the room.

About an hour afterwards, Georgina's comfort, for that afternoon, was completely destroyed by a visit from her odious mother-in-law; as her cold was in reality slight, Perceval having exaggerated it in the hope of saving her from an unpleasant tête-à-tête dinner with his mother, she was pronounced well enough to dine with Lady Gertrude; and, although that cautious person insisted on her confining herself to boiled whiting, bread pudding and barley water, Georgina was considered quite equal to reading aloud, which she did for nearly three hours, the only intermission being afforded by

Lady Gertrude's prosy, and sometimes personal, remarks on what she read.

In a true marital spirit Mr. D'Esterre had defended his wife ; nevertheless, his mother's ill-natured observations were not lost upon him ; and, from that time, although he abstained from all comment on the subject, he never saw Georgina reading or writing without internally regretting he had married a woman whose education had not been completed ; while Georgina, who in studying, had but the single object of remedying her own deficiencies, and thus rendering herself a more fitting companion for her husband, became saddened and dispirited by the little interest he appeared to take in her pursuits.

Nor could he sometimes forbear hinting a wish that her wardrobe were less scantily supplied. Georgina would gladly have acted on this hint, but as Perceval, with his usual thoughtlessness, omitted to provide the where-withal, and she had been unaccustomed to run

up bills, she could only feel mortified, and more than usually shy, when next obliged to wear the dress that had provoked his strictures.

Altogether, Georgina's brilliant marriage was far from proving happy; and, sore at heart and lonely, surrounded though she was by elegance and splendour, the drooping girl would often sigh for her still cherished cottage-home; and pine for the society of the indulgent friends she had left behind.

CHAPTER V.

ABOUT this time the annual ball for the county hospital took place : Mr. D'Esterre dined with his fellow stewards ; and Lady Gertrude intimated her intention of accompanying Georgina thither ; an arrangement disagreeable enough in itself, and rendered doubly unpalatable by the patronizing, favour-conferring, air Lady Gertrude assumed on the occasion. For Lady Gertrude, who hardly ever went into company (to be sure, she was not often asked), who piqued herself on her domestic habits, who was besides not in robust health, and afraid of cold, was about to

make an effort—a sacrifice—to incur a risk ; and she was quite determined that the person on whose behalf all this was to be done should be fully aware of the obligation bestowed upon her.

It is trying to the temper to be forced to do anything to which we have a decided disinclination ; and still more provoking to be treated as the obliged party. Georgina would gladly have remained at home, but her opinion was not even asked ; Perceval took it for granted she would like to go, and Lady Gertrude had resolved on self-immolation. A very wearisome affair it proved to Georgina. Lady Gertrude, who took upon herself the direction of everything, arrived full dressed to a five o'clock dinner, and as soon as the meal was concluded, she accompanied Mrs. D'Esterre to her dressing room, where a most minute inspection of her wardrobe took place.

“And what ornaments?” asked Lady Gertrude, after having tossed over the scanty stock

of evening dresses presented for her ladyship's approbation.

The lady's maid opened an etui, containing the family diamonds.

"Oh no ; not diamonds. Pray don't think of wearing diamonds at a public ball ; it would be the very height of vulgarity," exclaimed Lady Gertrude ; at the same time throwing back the lid of a very modest looking old fashioned trinket box. "Those pearl earrings are not amiss ; where is the necklace?"

"I have none," said Georgina. "The set belonged to my mother, and papa divided it between my sister and myself—Janet has the necklace."

"Humph ! Well, it's no great matter ; pearls would not have become you, they require a fair skin, and more delicacy of complexion," glancing at her own shrivelled throat.

"Brown skins last the longest," remarked the Abigail, saucily.

"Perhaps you will be kind enough to order

coffee," said Georgina, fearful of a storm.
"By the time it is served I shall be ready."

To her infinite relief, her tormentor withdrew.

"Ma'am," said Price, "if I were you, I would wear my diamonds, whether she likes it or not; that I would, if it was only to show that I would not be treated like a baby."

"No. Lady Gertrude is the best judge; I will not run counter to her opinion."

"She has not the spirit of a piece of tape," thought the waiting woman; fully determined to take advantage of her lady's gentleness, whenever her purposes or interests might so require.

When Georgina entered the drawing-room, she found Lady Gertrude sipping her coffee.

"Ah, you are dressed at last; let me see—" Georgina let her cloak fall. Lady Gertrude scrutinized her most carefully for some little time, then, without making any remark on

either dress or wearer, expressed her surprise that the carriage had not come round.

“It is, I believe, full early yet,” timidly observed Georgina; “it is now only nine, and Perceval said if we were there by ten o’clock, it would be quite time enough.”

“I don’t know, indeed, what Perceval’s opinion may be, but I have a very great objection to being the last person to enter a ball-room: it looks like an air, a wish to create a sensation—all well enough for people who are nobody—but those who know and feel their own consequence always avoid observation.”

Then, ringing the bell violently, Lady Gertrude ordered the carriage to be instantly brought round.

The distance was not great; the roads in good condition, and the horses fleet; still Lady Gertrude was not satisfied, but, during the whole drive, continued peevishly expressing her conviction that the rooms would be full; and

that, unaided by any cavalier, they should be obliged to work their way through the crowd.

No string of carriages, however, impeded their approach to the hotel; there was not even any considerable throng of people to witness their arrival. In fact, they were the first—the very first of all.

“Dear me, how tiresome—how very provoking. Just like those vulgar Misses who are afraid of losing the first dance! really, you should have managed better—Perceval ought to have been more explicit; and the room feels like an ice-house,” remarked Lady Gertrude, as they stood shivering before one of the fire-places.

“Some one must be first,” said Georgina, very unfortunately.

“Yes,” replied Lady Gertrude, tartly; “people who never put their nose into any thing but a public ball-room, and are determined to have the full value of their money, may, perhaps, like it, but that is neither my

case, nor my taste. Another time, however, I shall manage for myself; though I believe it will be some time before I again make such a sacrifice. Pray give me my tippet—it has fallen back.”

“Do you feel any draughts?”

“There is a current of air from that window that cuts me in two.”

“If your words were literal, and like a centipede you could be multiplied in that manner, what a misfortune would it be!” thought Georgina, as she vainly endeavoured to arrange Lady Gertrude’s ermine tippet to her satisfaction.

Gradually the room began to fill, and more than one kind hand grasped Georgina’s; and more than one fair group of girls would have willingly clustered round her—for there were mothers who could feel for the young stranger who had lately come amongst them; and her gentle, unassuming, *unwifely* manners, made

her a favourite with many of her own age, who might otherwise have envied her.

But Lady Gertrude, ever restless, hurried her away. "We shall not get seats, if we remain here; and I am quite faint already with standing so long. Lady Cotswold's party are, I see, at the other end of the room; we had better move in that direction."

Georgina offered her arm, and they threaded their way towards the head of the ball-room. Civil greetings passed between them and the Cotswold party. Lady Gertrude, at length, succeeded in establishing herself and companion in what she considered a fitting situation.

"Georgina," she said, after they had been seated about five minutes, "it's a pity you decided against wearing your diamonds — the whole set might, certainly, have been too much; but some of the ornaments would not have looked amiss—considering, too, how very plain your dress is. Lady Alicia Stuart, I see, has on emeralds; and Mrs. Hamilton Brown, dia-

monds, and pearls; so yours would not have been out of place. I am afraid Perceval will be disappointed, I know he likes to see a woman well dressed."

"Another time I will profit by your advice."

"Another time it will be quite different. It is as a bride—only as a bride you could with propriety have worn jewels at a place like this. Both Lady Alicia, and Mrs. Hamilton Brown are newly-married; I wonder you did not remember it."

Georgina was silent. Lady Gertrude amused herself with opening and shutting her fan, and then poured forth a string of questions.

"Georgina, who is that you have been speaking to? Who is Miss Davenport going to dance with? What gentleman is it that bowed to me across the room? Do you see anything of Perceval? Do tell me, who is that in pink and silver? and that elderly man with a bald head, so like the Duke of B——, who is he?—You don't know? Well, how very strange. You

should, really, have your wits more about you."

But, considering that Georgina had only been in that neighbourhood a few weeks, it was not at all singular she could not act sponsor to the many individuals who attracted Lady Gertrude's attention.

Presently Lady Gertrude's fan began to open and shut with redoubled vigour; for she saw a short, vulgar, overdressed man accost Mrs. D'Esterre and ask her to dance, and—she saw Mrs. D'Esterre rise from her seat, and take the arm of the unknown plebeian.

Now the fact was this: some evenings previously, after a dinner party, Sir Henry Ardingford, a near relation of Lord Cotswold's, asked Georgina to join in a waltz, which the young people had with some difficulty contrived to make up. But a married woman's dancing, more particularly waltzing, did not agree with her notions of propriety; she accordingly declined; and Sir Henry Ardingford, a very con-

ceited youth, who thought he had conferred an honour on Mrs. D'Esterre in selecting her for his partner, felt and looked offended by her refusal. Perceval was annoyed; he wished particularly to avoid anything that might seem like resentment towards the Cotswold family.

“Why did you refuse to dance this evening?” He enquired rather sharply.

“I do not think a married woman ought to dance.”

“Why not?”

Georgina hesitated for a reason, and then not immediately finding one, said, “you have no objection then to my dancing?”

“None in the world. I wish you to do that, or anything else, that pleases you—but, above all, to avoid giving offence.”

“Was Sir Henry Ardingford offended?”

“I think so.”

“I will dance whenever I am asked again,” thought Georgina—and now that the temptation of joining in an amusement of which she

was exceedingly fond, together with an escape from Lady Gertrude, were presented to her, she readily accepted the invitation, without suspecting that, although Perceval wished her to dance with the exclusive Sir Henry Ardingford, he would not be equally pleased to see her stand up with the plebeian Mr. Wagstaff. Still less did it occur to her that, at a public ball, it was not considered etiquette to dance at all.

The company at S—— might be divided into three classes. First, the high Aristocracy who honoured the assembly with their presence, but would on no account have compromised their dignity by joining in the amusement—then the Squirearchy, and one or two families resident in the town, who formed their own sets, and stood up only with their own immediate acquaintance—and a third and more numerous class, consisting of the families of the medical men, solicitors, gentleman farmers, and inferior residents at S—, who danced anywhere and anyhow, and enjoyed themselves excessively.

. It was in a quadrille, formed of the last mentioned individuals, that Perceval, who with some members of the Cotswold family, entered the rooms at a late hour, saw Georgina standing ; while her vulgar partner, with bowed out arm, and pointed toe, and smile of self-complacency, flew backwards and forwards in the figure of La Poule.

“Who, in the world, is Georgina dancing with?” he enquired of his august mother.

“I really cannot say—I know nothing of the gentleman. Some acquaintance of her own, I conclude.”

Perceval turned away, and approached Lady Cotswold. The Cotswold family were fond of quizzing—Lady Alicia Stuart, and a cousin of hers, Lord Olivius Yerfourd, were supposed to be great adepts in that pleasing and amiable pastime. They were all looking towards the quadrille, where Mr. Wagstaff was performing his graceful evolutions ; and, from the sudden silence and gravity assumed as Perceval drew

near, it was quite evident Georgina had furnished her share of amusement.

The quadrille ended, but Mrs. D'Esterre returned not. In fact, annoyed by the observation she felt he had attracted, as well as by the forward conceit of Mr. Wagstaff, she gladly exchanged him for a more eligible partner, Sir Henry Ardingford; and then, Mr. Wagstaff again solicited the favour of her hand; but Georgina refused—she had no wish for a second exhibition with so remarkable a performer: besides, it was getting late, and Lady Gertrude must be anxious to return home. Mr. Wagstaff, like the generality of vulgar people, was not easily repulsed; he accompanied her up the room, loudly protesting against her cruelty, and entreating she would use her sex's privilege and change her mind. They passed in front of the Cotswolds, and D'Esterre again saw a suppressed sneer of ridicule.

“I will go and enquire for the carriage,” he said to Lady Gertrude, “Georgina must have had enough of dancing I should hope.”

Lady Gertrude drew herself up majestically, as the trio approached; and stiffly bowing to Sir Henry, darted an annihilating glance towards Wagstaff. But the low-bred are as troublesome as flies—there is no getting rid of them. Mr. Wagstaff knew that an acquaintance with one of the leading county families would greatly add to his own importance, and persisted in remaining. He took his part, and more than his part, in the conversation. Cut his jokes—laughed at them—and finally, on Perceval's return to announce the carriage, offered his arm to Lady Gertrude, although Georgina had purposely avoided an introduction. Lady Gertrude felt positively insulted, and her diminutive figure received two inches in height, as, leaning on her son, she left the scene of so much mortification.

The silence that marked the commencement of the drive home was broken by an observation from Georgina, on the crowded state of the room.

“The ball,” she said, “had been well attended.” A remark unfortunate in itself, and rendered still more mal-à-propos by the tone in which it was uttered: for, as Lady Gertrude professed to feel a very great interest in the cause for whose benefit the assembly had taken place, she naturally concluded that a well filled room must be subject for congratulation to her mother-in-law.

“Well attended!” quoth Lady Gertrude. “I do not know what your notions of good company may be—but, for my part, I have never seen such an assemblage of vulgar people. I am glad, however, you have been gratified. You are, I presume, extremely fond of dancing?”

“Yes, I like it exceedingly.”

“And who, may I enquire, was your partner? I mean that individual who was so obliging as to offer me his arm.”

“His name is Wagstaff.”

“Wagstaff, Wagstaff!” repeated her ladyship, “and what is Mr. Wagstaff?”

“I really do not know. In fact, I scarcely know anything about him.”

“He is not then a very intimate friend?”

“Oh, no. When I was at Eastbeach with Lady Kingsbury, he was there, and I danced with him once or twice.”

“A watering-place acquaintance! Those watering-places are my aversion. Perceval, if your sister had lived she would never have been seen at a watering-place.”

There was a brief pause, after which, Lady Gertrude resumed. “Things are greatly changed in these days—we old-fashioned people little guess all that is going on around us. It is quite right we should sometimes emerge from our solitude, though I confess this evening’s experience will hardly tempt me out of my nutshell again.”

Perceval yawned rather audibly, which did not increase his mother’s good temper.

“When *I* was young,” she continued, “it was considered neither delicate nor decorous for a newly married woman to dance the whole night in a mixed assembly—or, I may say, to dance at all; but this is, I suppose, one of the improvements of the day. I believe, however, I am not singular in my ideas. Lady Alicia Stuart, I know, refused to dance, more than once.”

“Now,” thought Georgina, “Perceval will surely defend me.” But no, he seemed rather inclined to take Lady Gertrude’s side; until, on passing the turnpike, the light streamed on Georgina’s face, and, shocked at observing how much she seemed to feel his mother’s ill-natured strictures, said—

“Well, well, we have had enough of this. You are not well, Georgina; you are faint,” he added letting down the carriage window (for Georgina’s hand, which he had taken in his, was icy cold, and the blood [had left her cheek and lip, to curdle at her heart).

Yet it was not Lady Gertrude's, but her husband's, want of kindness that distressed her. Only a few days since, he had chid her for *not* dancing, and now he joined his mother in blaming her *for* dancing.

"Perceval, I shall catch my death of cold, if you keep that window down."

"Georgina is faint," he replied.

"She will catch cold too. Pray pull it up."

Perceval drew Georgina's cloak closer, but did not raise the glass.

"No, no, I am not faint—I've danced too much;" said Georgina, half pettishly, "put up the window."

Perceval obeyed; and Lady Gertrude was more displeased than ever.

"What can I have done?" exclaimed Georgina, when D'Esterre resumed his seat in the carriage after depositing his mother at her own home.

"Done? nothing."

"Oh, yes; I am sure there is something

amiss : Lady Gertrude appears to be so much displeased."

"That is her way; you must not mind my mother, she always was the greatest bore in life."

"But even you agreed with Lady Gertrude, and yet, you know, on Monday you bade me be careful how I refused to dance, lest I should give offence. I'am sure, I had no fancy for Mr. Wagstaff. Don't you remember speaking to me about Sir Henry Ardingford?"

"True;" rejoined Perceval; "but there is a wide difference between offending Sir Henry Ardingford, and Mr. Wagstaff."

Georgina saw the difference; and her good humour instantly returned. Perceval was exonerated from caprice.

During the short remainder of their drive, D'Esterre was all kindness towards his wife; but very soon the spirit of that false world, for which he had been educated, whose opinions had hitherto been his laws, crept over him, stifling

all better feelings ; and a sentiment of disgust, almost amounting to aversion, took possession of his mind as he recalled the ball-room, with Georgina's partner—the quadrille she had joined—and, above all, the sarcastic looks and remarks of the Cotswold group.

“ Yes,” he pettishly exclaimed to himself, “ Georgina is, I dare say, gentle and affectionate and obliging, and so forth ; but I do wish she could contrive not to make herself ridiculous.”

Among the evil consequences arising from an apprenticeship to the vanities of the world, there are none more injurious to the character than the false views and judgments we are led to form. Pernicious follies, degrading vices, are more readily overlooked by members of a certain coterie than the most trifling deviation from the established rules of etiquette, or the slightest want of knowledge of the world. You may more easily be ignorant than inelegant—vicious than vulgar—unprincipled than unfashionable.

CHAPTER VI.

“How far to Ringland?” enquired Lady Kingsbury, of mine host of the Swan Inn, at —.

“Three miles and a half, or thereabouts. All right—drive on. Steady, boys; take care of the hill—all right.”

“Three miles and a half,” thought Janet, “in less than half an hour I shall be there! at Ringland—at *his* house—and receive my welcome from his wife—from Georgina, from my younger sister; and must witness his devotion to her—his affection!”

As the plantations on each side of the road marked the approach to the property, Janet sadly reverted to the idle dream she had once fostered. "Yes, yes, I loved him; it was not for Ringland, for the place he held in society, it was for himself, I loved him. Had it been far otherwise, had Perceval been poor, overlooked, neglected, I should still have loved him. And now, what are my feelings? Do I love him still? No, I despise, I hold him in contempt; not only for forsaking me, but for the choice he made. Still is he hers? no, no. He does not, he cannot, love Georgina: there may be admiration; her beauty may have caught his eye; but it is impossible Perceval D'Esterre can *love* anything so unformed, so ignorant of life. And yet she was preferred to me; her happiness built upon the wreck of mine!"

"Janet," said Lady Kingsbury, suddenly, "are you attached to Mr. D'Esterre?" Janet paused for a moment; then, in a firm, steady voice, replied—

“No.”

“Were you ever attached to him?”

“Never.”

“It is well; I am glad to hear it. You know, I always told you he was not sincere, and warned you of the risk you run. I must confess there have been times when, from the inconsistencies of your conduct, I have been led to fear your affections were engaged.”

“What inconsistencies?” asked Miss Irving, in rather an alarmed tone.

“I need not remind you of the pleasure you appeared to take in his society, or the encouragement he received from you.”

“True,” replied Janet; “Mr. D’Esterre’s position in the world is such that, had he offered, I should hardly have felt justified in refusing him; but he never possessed my love.”

“So you assured me when he left Eastbeach in that abrupt manner, and I then believed you. But I must acknowledge that the agita-

tion you betrayed on first learning Georgina's engagement, together with that sudden illness which prevented your attending the wedding, have raised doubts in my mind. You may have deceived yourself."

"No," answered Janet, firmly, "I was surprised; perhaps, if the truth must be told, a little mortified, to find how easily Mr. D'Esterre transferred his preference to another woman. With regard to my illness, it would have happened precisely the same had I been engaged to go to any other place. I am not immortal, nor can I control my destiny."

"And the earnest wish to postpone our visit; whence does that arise?"

"The D'Esterres are but lately married—hardly out of the honeymoon; circumstances under which people are not, in general, particularly pleasant companions, nor very anxious for additional society."

"Georgina will, however, I am convinced, be glad to see us; and will make every effort to

render you both happy and comfortable while at Ringland," replied Lady Kingsbury, a little nettled by Janet's manner.

"I have no doubt of it."

"And," pursued Lady Kingsbury, "I have heard this assurance of your being heart-whole with very great satisfaction. For, to say nothing of the immorality of such an attachment, it might have interfered materially with your advancement in life. Had I entertained any doubt upon the subject, I could not, with propriety, have suffered you to remain long under the roof with Mr. D'Esterre. As it is, I do it with the most perfect security; and, as this is quite a new field, for you will, of course, meet the first men in the county at his house, you may, perhaps, be as fortunate as Georgina."

"Do you mean to stay long—I thought our visit was limited to two days?" asked Janet, with some anxiety.

"*Mine* is; but there is no occasion for your

leaving Ringland—on the contrary, it is more natural, as well as more eligible, that you should spend some little time with your sister. In my opinion, the house of a young bachelor like Marcus, is not precisely the place for a girl of your age ; at least, I think Georgina's preferable—so you will remain with her, and join me on my return to town, when my visit to my son expires.”

“That will not be until the middle of next month ;” thought Janet. And she cast involuntarily a look of supplication towards her aunt. But Lady Kingsbury's veil was down, it was dusk, she was short-sighted and did not see it : perhaps if she had, she would not much have heeded it, for she was now about to put her long cherished scheme into execution ; and having satisfied her conscience by the foregoing interrogation, determined to spare her son the risk of a month's exposure to Miss Irving's attractions and assiduities.

From deference to the memory of her hus-

band, Lady Kingsbury had continued to retain Miss Irving near her; and had given her every advantage and opportunity of securing the grand desideratum of a young lady's existence—a good marriage: but she had never been really partial to her, for, although Lady Kingsbury was certainly far from frank herself, she disliked insincerity in others. She was pleased, also, at seeing young people like young people; and that, even as a girl, Miss Irving had never been. Above all, she did not admire the siege Janet was preparing for Sir Marcus.

Georgina's marriage, however, released Lady Kingsbury from the obligation of keeping Miss Irving always by her side; and it was her ladyship's full intention to make her niece over to the D'Esterres, in great measure, at least; and, until her son married, to avoid having any permanent young lady in the house. When Sir Marcus was safe, one of her nieces should live with her—and, until that time, Janet and the Miss Fitzgroves must take it by turns, to

pay her a visit when she wished for additional society. But, however pleased to find her wishes in so favourable a train, Lady Kingsbury would not have adhered to her present intention, had she been aware of the real state of Janet's affections ; for, although a woman of the world, she was not altogether devoid of feeling, or reckless of consequences ; and had Miss Irving spoken the truth, or, indeed, anything like the truth, she would have been spared an arrangement whose very idea filled her mind with shrinking and repugnance. But the steadiness and pertinacity of her denial removed all her aunt's suspicions ; the evident reluctance with which she acceded to the plan appeared to Lady Kingsbury the result of annoyance at being frustrated in her designs on her son ; it is not altogether surprising, therefore, that the prudent mother persevered in her determination.

Nor was this the only occasion when Janet's duplicity brought its own punishment. Had

she not equally misled her sister, common prudence, to say nothing of higher motives, must have ensured Georgina's rejection of Mr. D'Esterre's addresses. Honesty is the best policy even in this topsy turvy world of ours.

No outbreak of feeling characterised the meeting—Janet was calm—but, in the deep recesses of her heart, how much of evil passion lurked; what pride—and disappointed love which turned to hate—what thirst for vengeance, though the weal of one or both her victims were involved! Georgina had supplanted her—Perceval deceived—and both shall pay the forfeit of her wrong!

Lady Kingsbury talked a good deal, as, indeed, she always did; expressed her sincere pleasure at the marriage, and congratulated both the young people upon their mutual happiness. Janet accosted Perceval with the frank cordiality of a near relation—and embraced Georgina with all the apparent warmth of sisterly affection. D'Esterre was pleased: to

say the truth, he had looked forward with some little trepidation to his first interview with his sister-in-law; for, although he did not believe she had been attached to him, in fact, he did not give her credit for heart enough to be attached to any body, he could not, on considering the business, acquit himself of having paid more attention than he ought to have done; and rather expected some display of resentment on the part of one who had, certainly, a right to consider herself aggrieved. It was therefore much relief to him to perceive that Janet retained no unpleasing recollections; and this manifestation of apparent generosity gave birth in his mind to a sentiment of esteem and admiration for her which he had never entertained before: while Georgina, who had always been strongly attached to Janet—who, surrounded by strangers, was pining for intercourse with her own kindred, greeted her sister with an affection whose intensity must have softened any heart but an envious one.

And what were Janet's feelings? What the workings of her inmost mind? Reader, may you never know them, for they were fiendish; may you never experience the bitter agony, the withering hatred that distorted her fine features, and blackened all her soul, as she paced her chamber on the second evening after their arrival. Perceval was to her an object of contempt—of scorn—a mere weather-cock, who deserved not one single regretting thought. But Georgina, whom she had ever envied, who had been preferred to her in infancy, whose lot had always been more blessed than hers; the younger sister placed above her elder; the unformed country girl supplanting the more finished Belle, winning away the prize she sought to gain! Georgina, always disliked, was now abhorred and loathed! She seated herself before the toilet mirror, and, leaning her chin upon her hands, remained for some time plunged in a chaos of painful and conflicting thoughts; while the heavy tears of rage and

mortification trickled down her flushing cheeks. She glanced her eyes round the apartment; the extreme, even costly, elegance of the furniture gave a keener edge to the hateful passion that overwhelmed and mastered her.

“Yes,” she exclaimed, again traversing the room with quick unequal steps, while her eyes gleamed with almost demoniacal fury; “I have been trifled with; I have lavished my affection on an unworthy object; but I could forgive him all his falsehood, his fickleness, his cruel desertion; all, all I could forgive, had he married any one but *her*!”

The next day was spent in going over the house; walking and driving in the grounds. The weather was fine, bright and sunny, and Ringland, even at that season of the year, was a place many would have coveted. The Park, though not extensive, was well stocked with fine old timber; and, from the inequality of the ground, offered more than one spot of romantic beauty. The shrubberies and pleasure

grounds, planned by a first rate *artiste*, maintained at an expenditure far beyond the sum warranted by D'Esterre's income, were, in their way, a perfect specimen of the English garden : but it was the house itself which rendered Ringland superior to the majority of country gentlemen's places. On that Perceval principally prided himself—on that he had spent immense sums of money : and, as far as comfort, convenience, elegance and cheerfulness would go—not, certainly, in vain.

It had been a solid, substantial building, raised by his grandfather, and considerably increased by the present proprietor, who built wings, threw out windows, made a new entrance hall, and contrived to impart an air of elegance to the whole edifice, not often to be seen in English houses. The rooms were spacious, light and gladsome ; the windows looked the right way (which is not always the case ; many houses are so situated as to turn their backs upon the prettiest prospects, and

face the least interesting); the breakfast-parlour opened into a conservatory, and baskets of choice hot-house flowers stood in the hall and sitting-rooms, scattering around their balmy fragrance. The furniture was of the richest description ; superb damask fell in thick folds around the plate glass windows : a profusion of sofas, fauteuils, couches and ottomans invited ease and promised rest. Books, elegantly bound and tastefully selected, tempted alike the literary and curious mind. Sevre china, alabaster vases, exquisite paintings, and well-executed casts from antique statues, bore testimony at once to Perceval's taste and extravagance. The foot fell noiselessly on mossy velvet pile carpets ; while from vast mirrors, was, on every side, reflected that sight so very gratifying to a pretty woman—her pretty self.

Such was Ringland—and Perceval, elegant, graceful, lively and agreeable, appeared the fitting owner of so fair a place ; and this was the

home of which Janet had been bereft by her sister—and that the man who, but for Georgina's artifices, would have been her's. Janet sickened with envy at the magnificence by which her sister was surrounded; and it required all her habitual self-controul to master and conceal the torture she endured—but it was concealed, and Lady Kingsbury departed full of delight and self-complacency, for she arrogated to herself all the credit of Georgina's brilliant marriage; and she rejoiced in the prospect of escaping from the onerous task of continuing to chaperone a girl who did not seem likely to "go off." In future the charge would fall principally on Mrs. D'Esterre.

CHAPTER VII.

BUT Janet was not without a measure of consolation. Georgina's début in ——shire had been a failure—Janet's was a perfect triumph. Her easy, yet dignified, manner—her lively, conversational powers—her tact—her taste in dress—her ladylike appearance, rendered her a prodigious favourite with her own sex; she was not, it is true, so beautiful as Mrs. D'Esterre, nor had she the high patrician look of Lady Alicia Stuart—but she was less haughty than the young Peeress, and her diversified accomplishments threw Georgina completely into the

back ground. With the gentlemen, Janet was not altogether so popular ; she was too artificial a character to please them : for men, excepting in those cases where they are themselves the dupes of individual dissimulation, are keen penetrators of female disposition. Still, as she amused and entertained them, they crowded round her, and Janet's heart beat triumphantly, for she knew that Perceval's eye often rested on her—that always, when she spoke, he was an attentive listener—that his ready smile ever followed her brilliant repartee. Still Perceval was not in love. Janet knew he was not—she did not wish he should be ; for her notion of propriety forbad the idea of such an attachment.

Immorality is not the Englishwoman's fault. We sin more in the way of envy, of detraction, of prejudice, of want of charity. An Englishwoman must be already fallen, indeed, who can, even in thought, tolerate the slightest breach of chastity. Janet did not wish her brother-in-law to fall in love with her—but she wished him not

to love his wife, and she felt that, in proportion as *she* rose in his estimation, Georgina must sink; and to destroy the happiness purchased at the expense of hers—to darken prospects which had eclipsed her own was bliss to Janet's envious mind.

But Miss Irving's estimation in general society was nothing compared with the violent predilection Lady Gertrude conceived for her, almost from the first moment of their meeting. And the feeling was reciprocal; Janet really liked the tiresome old woman, and would gladly spend hours in her society, simply because, as she very soon discovered, Georgina was no favourite with her mother-in-law. Poor Georgina! Everything conspired against her, and nothing more than this mutual partiality. For while pride and prudence prevented Janet from directly prejudicing Perceval against his wife—no such difficulties restricted her intercourse with Lady Gertrude; and she soon became aware that whatever she might think

proper to impart to the old lady would speedily find its way to her son, of course, very much improved by Lady Gertrude's notes and annotations. She learnt, too, from her that D'Esterre's affairs were in much disorder, and reflected with infinite satisfaction that Georgina's brilliant position was not only highly insecure, but that, when the reverse came, it would be rendered more trying by the contrast.

And all this while, Georgina, guileless, warm-hearted, and therefore unsuspicious, clung to Janet in the full trust of sisterly affection; looked up to her as to a being of a superior mould; and, with the frankness of confiding love, imparted every hope, fear and difficulty that she experienced. Amongst the rest, her toilet troubles—Janet listened with eager interest far beyond the attention persons usually bestow when their friends' annoyances are the subject of conversation, for she knew that, in Mr. D'Esterre's circumstances, economy would be her sister's best, and wisest policy. She had

also heard from Lady Gertrude a solitary note of commendation bestowed upon the simplicity of Georgina's taste in dress, coupled, however, with a prophetic fear that Mrs. D'Esterre would speedily lose even this petty claim to merit; and Miss Irving determined that, as far as her influence would carry weight—this apprehension should be speedily realised.

“Well,” she replied, after hearing Georgina's account of her embarrassment, “nothing is easier and more straight-forward than your path. You are not well dressed; Perceval, naturally enough, desires you should be—what have you to do but to gratify him? and be thankful that, in pleasing Mr. D'Esterre, you please yourself; wives are not always so fortunate, you know, Georgy.”

“But, dearest Janet,” replied Georgina colouring, “I have not the means.”

“Indeed! Is not Mr. D'Esterre liberal?”

“Oh, yes, Perceval is all kindness, I am sure he is. But it does not occur to him.”

“Then remind him.”

“I cannot.”

“There is not then much confidence between you,” thought Janet exultingly. “It is as I suspected—he does not care for her—does not even entertain a passing fancy. What can have made him marry her? caprice, perhaps. But though he does not love her now, his affection may be won; men are as open to flattery as women; and to one so weak and vain as Perceval, how winning the deferential love she feels towards him!” Janet would not have thought thus lightly of D’Esterre’s mental powers, had he not shewn himself blind to her attractions.

“You know,” pursued Georgina, little guessing what hatred was in Janet’s mind, “you know I brought Perceval no fortune whatever, and therefore I feel backward in asking for money merely for myself. Besides, dear Janet, I do not know how it is; Perceval is not, I believe, so rich as we all supposed; or, perhaps, this place is very expensive, but certainly he seldom appears to have much ready money:

even the settlement with the housekeeper sometimes seems to vex him, so that I am quite glad when it is over. Do you know, I often fear Perceval's affairs are not altogether as they ought to be."

"Perceval's tenants are probably backward in paying their rents, and, like other landed proprietors, he has not always ready money at command: but you must not hence infer that he is in debt—nor need you vex and mortify his feelings, I may add, risk his affection, by looking like a tradesman's wife. Nay, do not be displeased; you know I love and admire you more than any one—and therefore it is I speak thus openly. There are different styles of beauty—and yours is one which requires, in fact, will not bear any but, a *recherché* toilet."

"But is Perceval's affection built upon so unstable a basis as the colour or fashion of a dress?"

"Perceval's love, like the love of every other man, rests very much on your appearance; all

men are caught by the eye, as we are won through the ear. There is also something of pride in his wish that you should be well dressed : a man likes to see his wife admired. Perceval was attracted by your beauty."

"I think it was rather my singing;" said Georgina, "at least, you know, he never took much notice of me until after he heard me sing."

"True," replied Janet, "but I question whether he would have been so captivated by your voice, had the lips been less ruby-like, or beautifully formed. And, by-the-bye, talking of music, reminds me to ask why you confine yourself to such simple airs? your compass of voice entitles you to take a much higher range. You should try the Italian school."

"I do not know enough of the science of music."

"Oh, that is of no importance; with your talent it would come almost intuitively."

"I do not think it."

“Try, at any rate; let us practise this duett together; that recitative and air of Bellini’s also, that Mrs. Belmont sang the other evening would suit your voice admirably,” said Janet; who knew that Georgina, timid, shy, and uninstructed, would never be able to accomplish so difficult a piece; and that nothing would annoy D’Esterre more than a failure of this description. “But we are digressing,” resumed Miss Irving; “there is not the slightest occasion for you to teaze your husband by perpetually asking for money to pay your shoe-maker or mantua-maker. Order what you want, and the bills will be sent in, and discharged at Christmas.”

“My dear Janet, I could not venture on such a step. I have never been accustomed to have bills.”

“Are there not many, very many things in your present situation, to which you were not formerly accustomed?” asked Miss Irving, almost sneeringly. “Besides, it is thus that

all persons of any sort of (I had almost said) respectability, are in the habit of providing for themselves. You do not suppose that Lady Alicia Stuart, or Mrs. Belmont, pay on the spot for every pair of shoes or yard of ribbon they may require. Has Lady Gertrude no bills?"

"But I am not like the people you have mentioned," said Georgina, in a humble tone.

"Your marriage has placed you on an equality, or nearly so, with them; and, in entering a fresh sphere in society, your care should be to conduct yourself in all respects as do the individuals moving in the same circle."

"But had I not better consult Perceval?"

"I should say not. Perceval has expressed his wishes, it is your duty to fulfil them; and, if he dislikes the subject of money matters, why do you bore him with it?"

"Then," said Georgina, "I will write directly to Madame Regrier; and, as the day is fine, we will drive into S——, and purchase

wherewithal to give my fine-lady waiting-woman something to exercise her ingenuity upon. How glad Price will be ! I believe she is quite ashamed of my homely appearance."

But it occurred to Janet that any sudden outbreak of this kind might be attributed to her suggestion ; she thought proper, therefore, to moderate Georgina's zeal.

"You will be in town so shortly that it almost seems a pity to order things to be sent down. They might not fit, or be such as you would have chosen. S—— does not seem a likely place to furnish anything worth looking at ; besides, the spring fashions are as yet undecided. I really would advise your waiting until you get to London. But why do you prefer Madame Regnier to Carson?"

"Because she is Lady Gertrude's milliner, and I know Perceval would wish me to employ her."

"You are very attentive to his wishes—quite a model for a wife—a perfect Griselda," said Janet, tauntingly.

“Think, Janet,” replied Georgina, rather warmly, “of all I owe Perceval, and then ask yourself whether, to say nothing of affection, I can do less than study his wishes.”

“As for your debt to Perceval, I must confess, it does not appear to me so very overwhelming; for I am one of those persons who see no such great obligation in an offer of marriage. When a man proposes to a woman, he does it to please himself, not her.”

“It may be so; but I shall always feel that, in choosing one so unworthy of him, Perceval has conferred an obligation which calls for all my affection, love, and gratitude.”

Janet said no more; for Georgina was becoming excited, and looked, in consequence, so much more beautiful than usual, that Miss Irving felt it would be unwise to persist in advice that might, perhaps, issue in a result the very reverse from her intention. There was great reason to fear that, if Georgina came forth in the new character she had suggested,

she might prove a thousand times more attractive than at present. Georgina willingly postponed her purchases, but Janet took good care the resolution should not die away.

Lady Kingsbury found the company assembled at Merton Lodge so little to her taste that she abridged her visit, and returned to town; where, as she was tired of being alone, neither of the Miss Fitzgroves being disengaged, she desired Janet to join her. Miss Irving, joyfully obeying the summons, made a long farewell call on Lady Gertrude, and left Ringland with a much lighter heart than she had entered it; for Georgina, married to a man whose affections were not hers, and whose affairs were in disorder—Georgina, placed in a station for which her education and previous mode of life wholly unfitted her; the subject, too, of Lady Gertrude's perpetual unkind strictures, was hardly an object of jealousy.

CHAPTER VIII.

It might be supposed that Janet, satisfied with finding the old adage, "all that glisters is not gold," had proved itself correct in her sister's case, would have foreborne darkening the shadows that were already overspreading a prospect once so fair and promising: on the contrary, her last tête-à-tête interview with Lady Gertrude was spent in still further alienating the old lady's mind from her daughter-in-law. The result was, a note to Perceval from his mother, begging an immediate and private conversation.

“What’s in the wind now?” He said, impatiently, throwing down her ladyship’s note. “What can she want to say to me? Some squabble with her landlord; or, perhaps, a lecture for my extravagance. Well—I shan’t stay long, at any rate; so, Georgy, get on your habit, I shall be back by the time the horses come round.”

Georgina had no great pleasure in riding. True, Perceval had purchased for his bride a very beautiful grey Arabian; but it was spirited—and she a timid rider. As, however, she said nothing of her fears, and it never occurred to Mr. D’Esterre that a born and bred country girl could possibly be otherwise than a good horsewoman, there was seldom a favourable day in which she did not, with trembling, hear a ride proposed; and it was with reluctance now she left the breakfast-room to change her dress. In the hall she met the servant with the letters—one was from Atherley, and its contents speedily put every other idea to flight.

“Well,” said Perceval, abruptly entering his mother’s sitting-room, and standing before her without removing either hat or gloves. “What’s the matter now—has anything happened?”

“I wish to speak to you;” said her ladyship, solemnly.

“About what? Be quick; Georgina is waiting for me, I have not a minute to spare.”

“In that case, I had better reserve my communication till you are more at liberty.”

“I suppose it’s nothing of very great consequence?”

“That is as it may be—people think differently on these subjects. But pray do not let me interfere with Mrs. D’Esterre’s wishes—I beg I may not detain you.”

Perceval looked towards the window; the sun shone brightly, it was the first fine day they had had for some time, the breaking up of a frost; the roads still hard, though no longer slippery—no wind; in short—the very day for horse exercise, and Perceval was passionately

fond of riding. He thought he would go—Lady Gertrude's communication, whatever it might be, could be just as well listened to on his return. He glanced his eye towards his mother, and she looked so very sour, so exceedingly annoyed, that he resolved to be dutiful, and stay. He drew a chair towards the fire, seated himself, placed his hat upon the ground, laid his gloves therein, and awaited in silence her ladyship's disclosure.

"Perceval," she said, after a grave pause, "although it is painful reverting again to this ill-advised marriage of yours," ("The old story," thought D'Esterre,) "I wished to speak to you—"

"Well," replied he, impatiently; "and what have you got to say—nothing, I am sure, that I have not heard twenty times before."

"This ill-advised and unfortunate marriage," again began Lady Gertrude.

"Hold," interrupted Perceval, "that my marriage was not altogether prudent, I do not deny; indeed, perhaps, circumstanced as I am,

over head and ears in debt, I ought not to have thought of marrying at all—but that it is unfortunate, or even likely to prove unfortunate, I utterly deny.”

“I am sorry to hear you speak in so light a manner—I should have hoped that no son of mine could have contemplated the probability of his dishonour without anxiety.”

“Dishonour? What are you thinking of—what can you possibly mean?”

“Simply what I have said.”

“Then allow me to observe, I consider the suspicion your words imply both absurd and unfounded. I repose the most perfect confidence in Georgina.”

“The most confiding husbands are not always the happiest.”

“Georgina’s principles, even her ignorance of the world, are a sufficient guarantee, without advertng to the affection——”

“She does *not* feel for you.” (Perceval started.) “Yes—you are astonished, perhaps

even displeased, that I endeavour to open your eyes to the truth. But I have considered the subject much and painfully, and I feel it is my duty to warn you of the danger, and to inform you, that she whom you have honoured by selecting her as your wife—she who now fills the place I once occupied, was, at the time of your proposal, engaged heart and hand to another man, who was discarded to make way for you ; but though discarded, he is not forgotten.”

“ Who told you this ? ”

“ I cannot give up my authority ; but it is unquestionable, and confirmed by my own observation.”

“ How ? ”

“ To what other source can we trace all this gloom, this lowness of spirits ; the tears, which more than once I, myself, have witnessed ? ”

“ Mother,” said Perceval, “ you are not, you never have been, partial to Georgina ; she does not always receive from you the kindness to which my wife might feel herself entitled.”

(Lady Gertrude drew herself up) "I really don't know what degree of attention, court and deference your wife expects from your mother—nor how far she may have abused the immense influence she has over you, to prejudice you against your earliest and best friend."

Now there was nothing in the world D'Esterre dreaded so much as the idea of being under petticoat government: he would not have allowed that he was led by anybody—but least of all by his wife, and he answered truly enough—"Georgina has no such influence, nor will she ever have."

"I am glad to hear it. Even for her own happiness, a wife should be subservient to her husband in all respects," replied Lady Gertrude, who, it was said, had ruled her Lord with no gentle sceptre.

"Have you anything more to say?" asked Perceval.

"Merely this—that, having well considered the danger to which Georgina, young and inex-

perienced, will be exposed during her stay in London, I have determined on postponing my journey to Scotland, and you must make me welcome for a couple or three months in Grosvenor-street. You know, I give no trouble in a house.” (Perceval walked to the window, to conceal his excessive vexation) “If,” pursued Lady Gertrude, “Miss Irving could have resided with you during the spring, there would have been no necessity for deranging my plans, for I feel the most entire confidence in her prudence and discretion: but that, it seems, is impossible, quite impossible; Lady Kingsbury, who doats upon her niece, will not hear of it.” (How very unfortunate, thought Perceval.) “And as it appears to me absolutely necessary Georgina should have some sort of Chaperone, I have resolved on sacrificing my intention.”

“My dear mother, you are very kind; but do you think the danger so urgent? under my guidance and watchful care she will surely be safe.”

“Under any other circumstances, perhaps, she might: but the gentleman in question is a near relation, a cousin; one whom you could not shut your doors against. And as I conclude you will not spend your whole life in your wife’s drawing-room, it is quite essential there should be some one to prevent tête-à-tête morning visits.”

“How horribly unlucky,” muttered Perceval, still standing at the window; “the very thing I married to escape; if once she gets established in the house, there will be no getting rid of her;” then added aloud, “but even admitting the truth of your information; allowing that a less wealthy suitor was sacrificed to me, does it follow that Georgina still cherishes an attachment to him?”

“Not willingly, perhaps; but, if there be not something of this nature, why, as I said before, this lowness of spirits—those tears which, when I have come unexpectedly into the room, I have, more than once, seen brushed hastily

away? you do not suppose she is weeping over the wretched home she has left? I understand, from Janet, nothing can exceed the misery and poverty of it. Her father, absolutely distressed for money, and hardly able to give her the common necessities of life. No wonder he caught so readily at your imprudent offer—in fact, you have been fairly taken in by a set of unprincipled needy people. I do not wish to accuse her of anything beyond want of candour; for, in all probability, she is nothing more than a weak tool in the hands of a sordid parent; but, marrying under such circumstances, she, certainly, ought not to have had any concealments from you; and had she been as upright and high principled as you appear to think her, there would have been none:—we must, however, make allowance for the difference of education and general mode of thinking of persons in her class of life.”

“Persons in her class of life? you speak as though my wife were actually one of the lower

orders. Her father is a gentleman, at any rate."

"A very poor one;" rejoined Lady Gertrude, with a sneering laugh.

"I'm not much better myself."

"Ah, that reminds me," said Lady Gertrude, turning over some papers that lay upon the table; "here is a draft for two hundred and seventy pounds which may be of service to you:—Nay, do not refuse, I can easily spare it, or even more. You know, I shall be at no expense for the time I remain with you. I have already contracted for the disposal of the furniture of this house; and, as my carriage would require some extensive repairs, before it could be used for taking a long journey, I have resolved on parting with it at once. Mrs. Belmont wants just such an one, and you must give me a seat in yours up to town, and I can purchase a new one there; if, indeed, I do not decide upon going to Edinburgh by Steam and suiting myself afterwards. So do not think you are robbing me by making use of the loose cash, I have in my banker's hands."

D'Esterre took the bill, for he knew that by refusing he should pain his mother, who, amidst all her failings, was not fond of money; and shortly after, bade her good morning and returned home. He went straight to his private room: upon the table lay several long, wafered, bill-looking letters; but, excepting an exclamation of peevishness, they extracted nothing from him. A drawer was hastily opened, and after turning over several papers that, in much disorder, lay therein, he came to Major Berrington's epistle. It contained, as, perhaps, our reader will remember, a positive denial of any previous attachment on Georgina's part. In short, as it appeared to Perceval, an absolute, most ungentleman-like falsehood.

“The temptation was great, I suppose,” he said, mentally; “but nothing could warrant so flagrant, so dishonourable a breach of trust. Had I not positively asked the question, some excuse might be found in his excessive poverty; but, as it is, there can be but one opinion on

the subject—Major Berrington is no gentleman, and his daughter, pshaw, I will not think of her; she is young—she has been sacrificed:—and, by the bye, I suppose she is waiting all this time for me.”

As D’Esterre concluded this soliloquy, he reached the drawing-room, where he found his lady with her dress unchanged, and very evident traces of tears upon her countenance. The sight did not increase his good humour, and, in place of offering enquiry or condolence, he made a hasty observation on her being *unhabited*.

“ Ride!” said Georgina, vacantly, “ oh, true, I forgot; I beg your pardon, I will not be two minutes getting ready.”

“ It is almost too late; the day is changing, we shall have rain, I think.”

Georgina, always glad to escape a ride, thankfully caught at the suggestion, and D’Esterre, mounting his slight, beautiful chesnut, dashed off at a full gallop.

He rode fast and long, and when he again joined Georgina, the shades of evening had fallen around. The shutters were closed, and a bright blazing fire gave to the room that peculiar air of cheerfulness and comfort we find nowhere but in an English house. He placed himself in front of it, and, with his eyes fixed on the flickering flame, continued, in moody silence, to ruminate over his mother's unwelcome communication, and even more unwelcome plan.

Suddenly, Georgina rose, and trembling violently, addressed him thus—"Perceval, dear Perceval, you will think it very strange, very extraordinary, but I have had a letter from my father, and—and—oh I cannot tell you; it must appear so encroaching, so indelicate, after all your kindness and generosity —" then, unable to continue, she threw herself into a fauteuil, and covered her face with her hands.

"What is the meaning of all this?" enquired Perceval, taking up an open letter that lay on her lap. "May I read it?"

“Oh, yes; pray do.”

Perceval turned towards the blazing fire and began reading.

Major Berrington's dispatch was short, but most unwelcome; he informed his daughter that his difficulties had multiplied, that a sum of three hundred pounds was absolutely necessary to save him from the greatest inconvenience—fifty could be raised amongst his friends at Atherley, but the remainder might be alone attained by parting with his mortgage, which, under present circumstances, could be managed only on such terms as would be absolutely ruinous. He desired his daughter, therefore, to make an application to her husband for a loan of two hundred and fifty pounds, which, with the interest, he hoped to repay by instalments.

Georgina looked anxiously at Perceval whilst he perused the letter; and, observing an unusually grave expression upon his countenance, concluded the application fruitless; and, pictur-

ing to herself her father's disappointment and mortification, could not repress a groan of sorrow. Mr. D'Esterre took two or three turns up and down the room. With the recollection of Major Berrington's imagined falsehood still fresh upon his mind, he felt little disposed to proffer assistance to a man by whom he had been so egregiously misled; but Georgina's distress and agitation found their way to a heart naturally kind and feeling; and, after a few minutes' hesitation, he placed the bill on Lady Gertrude's banker, in her hands.

It had been Perceval's intention to follow up this act of kindness with hinting a hope that similar applications might in future be of rare occurrence; but the expression of joyful surprise, and, still more, the look of gratitude that flashed from Georgina's speaking eyes, effectually cut short his project. In truth, her happiness was excessive; she had worked herself almost into a fever at the idea of making

such an application, and the result, so far exceeding her most sanguine expectations, gave birth to a buoyancy of spirits—a feeling of lightheartedness she had never experienced since her marriage; for she could but see in her husband's readiness to oblige her father, a pledge of the fulfilment of her darling, but almost relinquished wish respecting Major Berrington's residence at Ringland; and, little suspecting how entirely unpalatable such a scheme would prove, in the course of the evening, after again expressing her gratitude, she ventured to broach the idea.

“If,” she said, timidly, “my father could be induced to give up that cottage and settle with us, all these difficulties, which now harass and perplex him, would be at an end; and he would be able to repay you both sooner, and with less inconvenience to himself.”

“Your father live with us—here—at Ringland?” asked Perceval with mixed horror and

astonishment—"Oh, it is out of the question—absolutely out of the question."

"Indeed, I do not think so. I dare say he would be very unwilling to leave Atherley ; but, with a little persuasion, I am almost certain it might be managed. You know, we might tempt him to pay us a visit, and, once in this beautiful place, he would, I am sure, be so happy, there would be no difficulty in prevailing on him to remain ; and then the debt—"

"Oh, as for that, it is not of the slightest importance ; let your father pay me when and how he likes ; or even not at all, if by any means inconvenient. But his residing with us is quite out of the question."

"I should like very much to see my father," said Georgina, in a saddened tone ; "I am certain he must feel my loss, as much as I do the separation from him."

"There is nothing to prevent your going to Atherley, or your father's coming to see you ; but as to Major Berrington's living here, it is impossible."

Georgina brightened. "Might we not take Atherley in our way to town?"

"You forget that Atherley is about fifty miles further north. And there is another difficulty, my mother will occupy my seat in the chariot."

"Lady Gertrude!"

"Yes; she has invited herself to stay with us for a few weeks previous to her departure for Scotland; it will be a monstrous bore, but, without absolutely affronting her, I really don't see how we can avoid it."

"And she travels with us?"

"Yes; she has sold her carriage, and reckons on a seat in ours."

There was an end of all Georgina's cheerfulness; the prospect of Lady Gertrude for an inmate was so thoroughly distressing; and she sat for some minutes in painful silence.

"How is it, Georgina," said D'Esterre, with a slight touch of peevishness, "that you and my mother get on so badly?"

“Indeed, I cannot tell; Lady Gertrude does not like me.”

“You don’t understand her; Janet, now, would have managed better, if I had married her, as people were kind enough to say I wanted to do.”

“Perceval,” said Georgina, quickly, “why did you not marry Janet?”

“Because I liked you better.”

“Then you were not refused; at least, I mean—”

“Refused?” replied Perceval, “no, certainly not. I never, for a moment, dreamt of proposing, and that Janet must have known the whole time.”

“Poor Janet,” thought Georgina, “how you must have deceived yourself! and you did love Perceval; yes, yes, assuredly you were attached to him, or you had not so easily believed that he loved you. And I have supplanted you, my poor, poor Janet—oh, what a claim you have on me—how should your happiness be my first charge!”

Then, still in silence, Georgina planned a thousand schemes, by which she hoped to repair the wrong she had involuntarily inflicted, and further Janet's welfare.

"Do you think," she said, suddenly, "do you think, Perceval, that, where the affections have been once given, it would be easy, or even possible to transfer them to another object?"

"What is your own opinion, Georgina?" answered Perceval.

Georgina hesitated—then, imagining it quite impossible she could ever meet another Perceval D'Esterre, replied, colouring slightly as she spoke—"I do not think it would; at least, not if I may judge by my own feelings."

"Is this simplicity carried to the brink of folly, or hypocrisy, or effrontery?" said Perceval, mentally; for he saw she was speaking experimentally, and he believed she alluded to her love for Maurice Arnold, "or is she guiltless of that love?" The last and true hypothesis was speedily dismissed. He did not

believe that *he* ever had possessed her affections—yet some one had; and everything concurred to point out Arnold as that individual. She was uneducated, but far, very far from being weak; and it was impossible to suppose that one so young could openly avow such sentiments. She was then artful—and sought by an appearance of excessive openness to disarm his suspicions.

This was not an agreeable surmise; and, though D'Esterre hastened to dismiss it from his imagination, as he usually did all unpleasant subjects, yet the false, injurious idea left its taint behind.

Excepting in very early life, favourable impressions of our fellow-creatures are only too readily relinquished; while those of a contrary nature, whether false or true, are all but indelible; so strong is our inclination to judge harshly—so great our tendency to condemn unheard—and yet, what is there more at variance with the spirit of true religion?

CHAPTER IX.

IT was the last day of the hunting season—Perceval had joined the sportsmen, and Georgina was in the act of sealing and directing the letter that would convey such welcome intelligence to Major Berrington, when an orange-coloured post-chaise, well laden with trunks and band-boxes, drove up to the door; and, after a good deal of shuffling about in the hall, the tones of a shrill, coarse, but, to Georgina's ears, familiar voice were heard, and in the next moment she was half stifled in Miss Rocket's arms. Then came a sharp, pointed embrace

from Theresa, and an affected one from Belinda, followed by volleys of questions, and exclamations of surprise and joy.

“Why you see,” said Rebecca, at length, “Miss Flagge is obliged to go to town on business, and thought of taking you in her way. Belinda wanted change—and I longed to see how you were getting on—so we joined together in a chaise (you know, my dear, three can travel in a chaise quite as cheap as by the stage) and here we are.”

It was well Perceval was not at home to witness the arrival, or the ready appetite with which the newly imported ladies assailed the well spread luncheon table; he did not, indeed, return at all that day; and, to say the truth, Georgina was not altogether sorry, when a note from him, announcing his having accepted Lord Cotswold’s invitation to dine and sleep at Hartingfield, was put into her hands; she had so much to ask about, so many enquiries to make, she was glad of an evening of unre-

strained intercourse with her friends. She hoped, too, that the exuberance of their admiration of Ringland would thus have time to sober down. In truth, that admiration was very overwhelming. The beauty, comfort, elegance so visible throughout the place—the number and good training of the domestics—above all, Perceval's generosity towards Major Berrington, quite surpassed the notions of the country born and bred spinsters; even Rebecca declared her willingness to enter the wedded life, could she meet with a Perceval D'Esterre: and warm and frequent were the congratulations Georgina received on her amazing good fortune. How little did they suspect the real truth!

“Well, Miss Flagge, we shall have a pleasant drive to day,” said Rebecca, on the morning after this arrival, as she put the finishing stroke to her out-of-doors toilet, by drawing on a pair of new dark green leather gloves. “But, Georgina, why are you not ready? The carriage has driven round—I'm sure Mr.

D'Esterre isn't like other men, if he chuses to have his horses kept waiting."

Georgina pleaded letter writing, a visit to Lady Gertrude, an engagement, in excuse for not accompanying them. The fact was, there was no room—Rebecca quickly saw the reason, and insisted that Belinda should remain at home. But Belinda submitted with an ill grace—Georgina still persisted, and Miss Flagge entreated to be allowed to stay behind—and thus for twenty minutes the matter was debated, and finally settled, as most debated subjects are, to the entire satisfaction of no one.

Perceval, though in a very different manner, had spent an evening entirely to his heart's content. A small knot of exclusives, of the very first water, were assembled at Hartingfield; the sort of persons with whom he had associated during the period of his fashionable reign. They were talented as well as exclusive—Lady Cotswold was all condescension, her daughter all grace and fascination; and D'Esterre, freed

from a kind of vague uneasiness, he usually experienced on Georgina's account when they were in public together, delighted at finding himself once more in the society he prized, gave himself up to the enjoyment of the moment; and for the time forgot every vexation—his debts—his mother's projected visit—even his wife—a slip of the memory (by the bye) not unusual with married gentlemen.

The next day proved very mild, and sweet, and spring-like. Lady Alicia Stuart declared her intention of riding, she had an errand of infinite importance in the town through which Perceval must pass to return home; and, accompanied by Sir Allan Stuart and Lord Olivius Yerfourd (the satirical cousin), they set off. Arrived at the shop, where lay Lady Alicia's business, she dismounted and entered the house, while the three gentlemen remained standing round the door discoursing about horses; which was all quite natural, seeing they were of the masculine gender, and that before

them stood five most beautiful specimens of that most beautiful animal.

Reader! Do you not love a horse? With his glancing eye, his arching neck, and crestlike mane—his glossy skin, and prancing, half coquettish gait, so full of grace and consciousness of power. To my mind, a thorough bred, high mettled horse, is like a beautiful, well-born woman.

“By the way, Sir Allan,” said a country gentleman who had joined the coterie, “do you know Webster has on sale one of the cleverest hacks I have ever seen—bay with black legs; just the thing to suit you.”

“Ay?” said Sir Allan Stuart, who was almost horse-mad.

“Yes; and it belonged to a friend of mine who is going abroad. If you feel inclined to take a look at it, I’ll step over with you to Webster’s.”

The Baronet put his arm within Mr. Barter’s, and, desiring his groom to inform Lady Alicia

he should overtake her, in case he was not returned by the time her ladyship's business was concluded, proceeded to that favourite place of man's resort, the stable.

Perceval watched their disappearance, and, then turning his head in the contrary direction, saw, with mingled feelings of surprise and horror, his well appointed, fashionable chariot making its way through the street with three females laughing and talking within, and on the box, side by side with the coachman, the beautiful Belinda, attired in a pea green silk pelisse and pink bonnet. Who all these women were Perceval could not tell; he had a faint recollection of having seen before the stoutest and most obnoxious looking; but that they were Georgina's friends, perhaps even relations, admitted little doubt—very dear ones, too, to judge by her extremely happy countenance. Perceval thought that in his whole life he had never seen such a collection of quizzes; and, full of terror lest they should recognise him, he made a pre-

cipitate retreat into the shop, ardently hoping they would not follow Lady Alicia's example, and alight. They did not—neither did Lord Olivius Yerfourd, who preceded Perceval, appear to have noticed them: he, therefore, trusted that, as it was already late, they were going straight home, and thus, perhaps, would escape observation.

But his anxieties were not to end here; when Lady Alicia was again seated on her palfrey, the habit duly arranged, the almost invisible whip in one hand, and the silken reins gracefully balanced in the other—she glanced towards the deep blue sky, enquired the hour, and, after passing a remark on the beauty of the afternoon, avowed her intention of prolonging her ride. They might, she said, proceed a mile or two on the turnpike road, and then return by one of the bye lanes; and at once lengthen the excursion, and avoid the monotony of retracing their steps.

Now it happened, that to reach the said bye

lane, Lady Alicia Stuart must pass the Lodge of Ringland, 'which was near, although not absolutely upon, the turnpike road : there was, therefore, every risk of their overtaking the carriage, and her ladyship could hardly have proposed anything more unpalatable to Mr. D'Esterre. Beyond, however, expressing his apprehension that the lane might be in an unfavourable state for riding, he, in common politeness, could not even hint his disapprobation of a scheme that secured him the continuance of her ladyship's society ; and this fear was speedily overruled. Two days before, very unluckily, Lady Alicia had made trial of the lane, and found it quite passable—there was nothing more to be said, Perceval was forced to appear delighted ; he could only hope that, as Lady Alicia was so bent on prolonging her ride, she would not hurry over the ground, and for this purpose he used every exertion, laid all his mental powers under contribution, to make the conversation too agreeable to be interrupted or

relinquished by an accelerated pace. Success crowned his efforts—Lady Alicia, piqued into rivalry, was as witty and sarcastic as Perceval was gay and entertaining. Highly diverted, she continued walking her horse, and they had nearly gained the point where the separation of the roads took place ; but there was a hill winding and steep, and Lady Alicia could not resist the temptation of an easy canter ; for all female equestrians are fond of cantering up hill, fonder, in all probability, than are their steeds. One of Perceval's stirrups gave way, he remained behind to right it, and, when a sharp turn of the road brought him in view of his fair companion, she was alone on the brow of the hill, her horse checked, and her attention engrossed by some not distant object.

“Mr. D'Esterre,” she cried, “quick, quick—an accident—a carriage upset, the livery is yours—I trust no serious consequences—Olivius and the groom are gone forward ; ride on, pray ride on—do not think of me. I am

fearful of increasing the confusion, and can be of no use—pray ride on.”

Perceval looked forward; midway down the hill, he beheld his carriage completely overturned and lying on its side. The traces were cut, the horses' heads held by two countrymen, while the coachman and Lord Olivius Yerfourd were busying themselves in extricating the inmates of the fallen vehicle. He required no second bidding, but, followed by his groom, galloped to the spot, where a crowd of ragamuffin boys had already collected. No one was hurt—even the carriage seemed to have escaped material injury—but the disaster, happening when and where it did, was vexatious to the last degree. Upset carriages have always been part of the machinery of fictitious narrative, but notwithstanding this, upset carriages are not picturesque looking things; and, although it is not an uncommon practise to date the dawn of mutual affection from such an event, I do aver that, to make one's exit with propriety from the

door of a carriage lying on its side, requires Taglioni's grace.

Georgina came first to hand, and, being young and active, reached terra firma without further *eccentricity* than that of displaying an inch or two more of her well turned ankle than she was in the habit of doing. Theresa also, light as a feather, was lifted out, and placed upon the ground without any particular mischance — but Rebecca, poor, fat Rebecca—it really seemed as if nothing would dislodge Rebecca ! At one moment she was seen to emerge as far down as the waist, then, a total disappearance would take place ; at another the crushed bonnet and swollen countenance were all that could be brought to view ; while the exclamations of those who tugged and pulled, and the stifled groans of the victim, added to her entreaties that “they would not pinch her so,” sufficiently disclosed what a work of difficulty it was to all parties.

“ Hang me, if I think anything but a lever

will drag her up," thought Perceval, as, in utter despair, he gave up the attempt, and relinquished his place to a sturdy farmer, who came from one of the neighbouring fields, to proffer assistance; and, after a few more hearty jerks and tugs, the weighty matter was effected; and Rebecca, half fainting, hot, tumbled and irritated, was finally placed upon her feet.

Precisely at this juncture Sir Allan and Lady Alicia Stuart rode up, and poured forth a multitude of enquiries and congratulations on their fortunate escape, which Georgina, who, despite the cloud upon her husband's brow, felt very much inclined to laugh, answered gaily enough.

"Fortunate!" muttered Rebecca, trying to put her bonnet straight; "I cannot say I see much good luck in the business. The carriage is scratched all over; and, as for me, I'm beaten and bruised to a mummy—and," added she, looking about, "what in the world has become of Belinda?"

More than one voice echoed the enquiry, and all looked round—but looked in vain—Belinda had disappeared.

“May so be,” at last said a dirty urchin of a boy, “the young lady lying in the ditch yonder is she you’re a looking for.”

Lord Olivius Yerfourd darted forward, and discovered the fair one lying on her back—not, however, senseless, as, *selon les regles*, she ought to have been; nor even deprived of motion—for, on the said cow-boy’s laying rather an unceremonious, and certainly dirty, finger on her shoulder, she started—and, presenting her hand to Lord Olivius Yerfourd, regained her feet without further difficulty, nor were her previous silence and immobility satisfactorily accounted for.

“Well,” said Miss Rocket, as she approached, clinging to Lord Olivius Yerfourd’s arm; “I told you it was a very foolish plan, your going on the box: now you see I was right, and, perhaps, the next time you choose to play footman, you will take better care of your livery.”

All eyes were immediately directed towards Miss Arnold, whose dress bore unequivocal marks of her late watery bed; and a coarse laugh from the rustics, a titter from Theresa, and a smile of peculiar amusement from the Cotswold party, greeted Perceval's vexed eyes and ears.

To conceal his annoyance, he turned to the coachman, and said, sharply, "How, in the world, did all this happen? How did you contrive to overturn the carriage? You deserve to lose your place for your awkwardness."

"'Tis an ugly job, sure enough, sir," replied the coachman, in a surly tone, "but 'twas n't altogether my fault, neither—nor, if every body had their due, I don't think 'twas my fault, at all; because, d'ye see, sir, 'twas all along of Miss *Harnold*; and so 'twould be a very hard case to take the bread out of my mouth for what I could'nt help by no manner of means."

"Well, but how did it happen?" again enquired his master.

“Why sir, d’ye see, the young lady is a bit of a coward, and though I told her, ever so often, there was no manner of danger, she would’nt be convinced, and it happened that just as we come to the top of the hill, a magpie hopped across the road and startled the *Hosses*, and the off *un* shyed a bit, and the young lady, she screeched out and catch’d hold of my arm, and that jerked the reins and frightened them more, and they set off at a full gallop, and, before I had time to pull them up, the hind wheel took the mile-stone, and we was upset; but nobody’s hurt, and I don’t believe the carriage will be much the worse; so, I hope, your honour won’t think of turning off an old servant, when he hasn’t been to blame.”

“Can I do nothing for you, Mrs. D’Esterre, I should be so happy to be of any service?” enquired Lady Alicia Stuart of Georgina, for having gratified her curiosity for the last twenty minutes, she thought, at length, of taking her departure.

“Nothing, I thank you,” said Georgina.

“Could we not leave a message at your lodge? Pray make us useful, suffer me to desire another carriage to be sent down.”

Now, excepting a Britska, which was under repair, the D’Esterres had no other carriage; neither had they more than one pair of carriage-horses. Independent of this, however, the distance was too inconsiderable to render any conveyance necessary. Lady Alicia’s officious offer was therefore politely declined, so, bowing gracefully, she and Sir Allan Stuart, who, better bred than his wife, had already made several attempts to induce her to depart, rode off.

Lord Olivius Yerfourd, however, remained, for the ostensible purpose of escorting the ladies, but, in reality, because the whole scene had afforded him far too much entertainment to be easily abandoned: calling out, therefore, to his party that he would overtake them, he desired Mr. D’Esterre’s groom to lead his

horse, and offered an arm to Georgina and her cousin. Perceval could not do less by the elder ladies, although, in truth, he would much rather have stayed behind to superintend the raising of the carriage; and thus they proceeded towards Ringland, Belinda's wetted pelisse and bonnet appearing to singular advantage as she walked in front, and adding considerably to her aunt's very unusual ill-humour.

Perceval's late feelings were not improved by the glimpse he occasionally caught of the countenances of those who were in advance; Georgina, far from sympathising with him, was evidently very much amused; Belinda, hanging upon Lord Olivius Yerfourd's arm, was looking up in his face with a sort of languid affectation, which, although at another time D'Esterre would have termed ridiculous, he now thought absolutely disgusting; whilst the sarcastic smile that played around Lord Olivius Yerfourd's mouth very plainly indicated what were his sources of merriment.

For some time, D'Esterre and his companions pursued their way in silence; Rebecca was too cross, Theresa too shy, and D'Esterre too angry, for conversation—nor may we marvel. Theresa possessed a sensitive mind; she had sufficient tact to perceive that she and her party were not altogether welcome to the owner of Ringland. She saw the wide difference of station between herself and those with whom, for the first time in her life, she was associating, and felt out of place. Shy, poor, and nobody, she had been thrown in contact with the rich and high-born, and by them was looked upon as an intruder, or made the object of their contemptuous mirth. Then, for Rebecca's discomposure—to say nothing of the damage to Belinda's wardrobe, there are, believe me, few ladies of her weight and years who would have undergone all she had done with perfect equanimity. And as for Perceval, the fastidious Perceval, whose aristocratic arms almost felt themselves polluted by their present office—

who may wonder that his brow should be darkened, when all his feelings had been so severely shocked; or, that he should regard his fair encumbrances almost with disgust, when he reflected what an admirable caricature would, ere long, grace his noble kinswoman's album, by way of illustration, to the capital story Lord Olivius Yerfourd would, undoubtedly, make of the disastrous affair. Besides, here was a confirmation of Lady Gertrude's predictions; and, to say the truth, his own occasional fears—an invasion of Ringland by his wife's vulgar relations: and, since they came in so unceremonious a manner, of course they would make themselves completely at home—do what they liked—go where they liked—and, worse than all—stay while they liked.

At length, Theresa, thinking common courtesy required some attempt at conversation, made the usual English reference to the weather, and expressed a fear lest they should have rain. Perceval looked up, and his vexation

rather increased ; for he could not help reflecting that, had the clouds, which now appeared sufficiently threatening to justify the apprehension, but overspread the heavens an hour or two earlier, Lady Alicia Stuart would not have been induced to extend her ride, and much of his present discomfort must have been spared.

“Aye,” exclaimed Miss Rocket, “it does look like rain, very like rain. I dare say it will rain, we only want a regular pelting shower to complete our good fortune. Not that I think it would do Belinda much harm, for perhaps if she got a thorough soaking, it would wash out the stains in her pelisse, and it might come out the same colour all over, instead of looking like a great cucumber, dark green on one side, and light on the other.”

“Belinda has been very unlucky, but indeed, my dear friend, you should not dwell so much upon a mere trifle, such as spoiling a dress : remember how much worse it might have been—even life was endangered.”

“Trifle! Humph,” replied Rebecca, in a loud voice; “I can tell you it’s no such trifle to have a new silk pelisse spoilt in this manner: she ought not to have put it on—I told her so—but, like all other young people, she ’s so obstinate, you might as well attempt to boil eggs in the sea as make her change her mind. Well—he’ll be a happy man that gets her for his wife—that’s all I can say.”

“Is the season as forward with you, as with us?” enquired Mr. D’Esterre, by way of stopping Rebecca; while, at the same time, he endeavoured to moderate the pace of his companions, so as to interpose the longest possible distance between them and the others.

“Yes—no; I can hardly say, but perhaps we are a little forwarder—not much certainly.”

They had now reached the lodge, where Belinda, anxious to prolong the walk, thought proper to make a dead stop, and expatiate on the beauty of the grounds, and the exquisite order in which they were kept; concluding with

the novel remark, that spring is a beautiful season.

“Yes;” replied Miss Rocket, “it’s all well enough—but do go on, Belinda; you ought to get rid of your wet clothes, instead of standing here gaping like a great green goose!”

“Yes,” rejoined Theresa, in answer to Belinda’s observation. “Spring *is* a beautiful season, and yet it always makes me melancholy.”

“I never knew anything that did *not*,” said Rebecca: “melancholy is the turn of your mind.”

“It is the turn of almost all reflecting minds,” remarked Perceval, softening towards his smaller and less offensive companion.

“What is that very picturesque ruin?” enquired she, after a brief silence.

“That is Pembril Castle.”

“Pembril Castle. Oh, I have heard much of Pembril Castle—Lord Cotswold’s, I believe?”

“Yes, it belongs to him; and those are his grounds,” replied Mr. D’Esterre.

“It must be very beautiful, to judge from a sketch Georgina shewed us this morning before leaving home. Does Lord Cotswold permit it to be seen by strangers?”

“I believe so,” said Perceval ; fully resolved, however, that neither Miss Flagge, nor any of her party should see more of Pembril Castle than Georgina’s sketch. “Are you fond of ruins?”

“Passionately.”

“Then you must gratify me by admiring a very picturesque old well and chapel which grace my park—there is a legend, too, attached to that spot which I will tell you when there ; that is to say, if, during your stay at Ringland we are favoured with a day sufficiently fine : for ‘the haunted well’ is only accessible on foot, and not always so,” said Perceval, hoping to gain some information respecting their departure.

“I shall enjoy it of all things,” exclaimed Theresa, enthusiastically.

“You are not afraid of a rugged road?”

The sentimental vein in Theresa's mind was all awakened by the idea of a visit to the haunted well. "The difficulties of the access will serve to render the spot more attractive to me; and, if the road be all you describe, I shall but see in it a true emblem of human life, which, to me at least, will never, I fear, be either smooth or straight."

"Don't you think, Miss Flagge, an iron would make it right?" asked Miss Rocket, intent only on Belinda's bonnet.

"An iron?"

"Yes; an iron—not too hot, and very carefully managed, might, really, I think, do some good."

"My dear friend, how your mind runs on that disaster."

"And enough to make it: just look what a figure she is with that great lump of mud sticking between her shoulders," said Rebecca; then, disengaging her arm from Mr. D'Esterre's, she limped forward, and, having reached her

niece, began dusting her down with a large cotton pocket-handkerchief.

Belinda was highly indignant at this interruption to the tender flirtation she was carrying on with Lord Olivius Yerfourd, and, pettishly, begged her aunt to let her alone; while Theresa, in a small, shrill voice, reminded Miss Rocket that, if she removed the mud before it was quite dry, the stain would be a thousand times worse than before.

“True, enough;” answered Rebecca, “I believe it is a hopeless case, and may as well be left alone.”

She did not, however, relinquish her place, but continued walking in a sort of hop and go one step by her niece’s side, for her ankle had been slightly strained, and was becoming painful and stiff. In this manner they reached the house; and, while Miss Rocket threw herself upon one of the hall chairs, the rest of the party stood grouped on the steps, Lord Olivius Yerfourd evidently longing to be asked to remain and dine, and Perceval all anxiety

lest Georgina should gratify him. But, as a spontaneous invitation was a stretch of her prerogative Georgina never ventured, Lord Olivius Yerfourd would have been disappointed, had not Belinda, whose anxiety on the subject, equalled, or, perhaps, exceeded, his own, suddenly pointed to a few straggling drops of rain, which were, she was certain, the forerunners of a dreadful storm. Perceval thought the weather looked more favourable than it had done an hour before, and Rebecca, vexed at her niece's folly, coincided with him; but his lordship, of course, was confident there would be rain; and as, unfortunately, a few more spots appeared upon the steps, D'Esterre could do nothing but proffer the much-wished-for invitation; and, in order to shorten as much as possible the intercourse between his dissimilar, but equally unwelcome, guests, carried off the young nobleman on pretence of consulting him respecting some improvements; and kept him loitering about until it was time to dress for dinner.

CHAPTER X.

“GEORGINA,” said Miss Arnold, entering her cousin’s dressing-room, “I’m come begging—to ask the loan of some artificial flowers for my head.”

“Artificial flowers?”

“Yes. What can you lend me, it must suit my dress; and, I should prefer a wreath—it is, I think, more classical, and would become me most.”

“I have no great variety, but all are at your disposal. Price will show you. But for what occasion?”

“The present.”

“My dear Belinda, we expect no company—we are nothing but a family party.”

“You forget Lord Olivius Yerfourd,” said Belinda, walking over towards the Wardrobe, on one of whose shelves lay Georgina’s scanty supply of artificial flowers, and, possessing herself of a wreath composed of blue non-descripts, with gold leaves, one of Janet’s presents.

“This will do, admirably,” remarked Miss Arnold.

“Oh, do not wear that,” cried Georgina, as Belinda placed the wreath, and began arranging her snaky curls with much apparent complacency; “pray do not wear that—I assure you it would be considered downright vulgar.”

“My taste in dress has never yet been disputed,” drily observed Belinda.

“Lord Olivius Yerfourd hates blue flowers, he says they are so entirely out of nature.”

“Besides, Miss Arnold, that wreath is quite faded; I wouldn’t recommend it, I wouldn’t, indeed,” said Mrs. Price, who thought it high

time the flowers should be transferred to her.

“Well, Mrs. Price, what can I have—those white roses?”

“Indeed,” rejoined Georgina, “I should advise, nothing. You have no idea how vulgar it is to be over-dressed.”

“Mean and envious ;” muttered Belinda, as she left the room, and repaired to her own apartment, where she occupied herself in making up some rosettes of narrow satin ribbon ; this, together with the difficulty Mrs. Price found in fastening her dress, detained her so long that she was the last person who entered the drawing-room. Perceval had been the first, and he watched the *entrées* of the various individuals with some little trepidation : but altogether, the result was not so bad as he anticipated. Miss Rocket, in a rich black *gros de Naples*, her usually brusque movements restrained by the difficulty she experienced in walking, was perfectly respectable, and Theresa, at any rate, was inoffensive ;—Georgina, simple

and modest, as she always was. The conversation, too, supported principally by himself, Theresa, and Lord Olivius Yerfourd, sensible and lively. Perceval was beginning to breathe freely, and to forget how very obnoxious a party had taken possession of his house, when the door opened—and Belinda, in a blue satin dress, black stuff shoes, coral necklace and York-tan long gloves, entered. The satin bows figured in her sandy hair; and a white paper fan, of no trifling dimensions, graced her hands. Perceval took one glance—then turned away.

“A capital addition for Lady Alicia Stuart’s album!” he exclaimed, mentally; and while with a sickening feeling of disgust he thought of the effect such an exhibition of vulgar finery must produce upon his aristocratic visiter, if he did not wish Belinda back in the ditch again, he would, certainly, have been better pleased, had she considered it more prudent to keep her room for fear of cold. And as, in this world, we usually suffer for the follies of our relations

and connexions, Rebecca was handed to the dinner-table with hardly common civility.

After dinner, the leading news of the day was alluded to ; of this, neither Rebecca nor Theresa knew much ; then politics were introduced, of which they understood still less : at length, the conversation took a literary turn ; here, at at any rate, Theresa found herself at home, and she occasionally surprised Mr. D'Esterre by the depth and acuteness of the observations which escaped her. She had been in the school of suffering, that only school where woman learns to know her fellows.

They spoke of the historians, the poets, the novelists of the day : then of that mighty master mind, who was all three, who had so many imitators, and yet stands, and probably will ever stand, pre - eminently alone. Perceval admired and criticised by turns ; Theresa, on whom all the difficulties of authorship were just now pressing with peculiar force, hinted a suspicion that something of Sir Walter Scott's

astonishing celebrity might, perhaps, be traced to his connexion with the trade; which Rebecca, an amazing admirer of the great unknown, because his writings contained so few love scenes, stoutly denied; but all agreed that such a man again they ne'er should see.

All this time, Lord Olivius Yerfourd was talking the most arrant nonsense to Miss Arnold, who listened with ecstatic delight, fully convinced she had at last captivated "a real Lord." Oh, how her heart beat, and her cheek glowed, and her eyes twinkled — and what visions of grandeur flashed upon her mind; and when he summed up all his rhapsodies with some allusion to Pope's *Belinda*, and avowed his intention of emulating her adventurous admirer, and thus gain possession of a ringlet of her hair, so great was her enchantment that, drawing on her York tan glove with more strength than caution, it split across the back with a loud cracking noise, and displayed to full advantage the hand within, looking

more red and coarse than it had ever looked before, owing to her feverish excited state of feeling.

“There !” cried Miss Rocket, from the other side of the table.

Belinda cast a look of defiance at her aunt, and placed her hand on her lap, and covered it with her pocket-handkerchief. Georgina, blushing for her vulgarity, made the signal for leaving the dining-room.

“Well, Belinda,” said her aunt, “you seem to be in the humour for spoiling your clothes to-day—pelisse, bonnet, gloves. Why, if this goes on much longer, you won’t have a rag to your back by the time we get home; and, by-the-way, what induced you to make such a figure of yourself? I protest, you look exactly like a rainbow walking about the room, I never saw such a mixture of colours on anybody.”

“The yellow gloves, certainly, might have been omitted,” observed Theresa.

“And that fan,” urged Georgina; “pray, Belinda, lay aside that fan.”

Belinda, too much elated by her new conquest to heed either stricture or advice, walked across the room, and, placing herself at the piano, began singing, in a sharp, nasal tone, a French romance, neither much known nor admired, but considered by her peculiarly applicable to the occasion, because it began

“Olivier, je t’attends.”

The delicate-mannered damsel did not wait; Perceval was in no humour to play the agreeable, and Lord Olivius Yerfourd speedily transferred himself to the drawing-room; where, after an ineffectual attempt to engage Georgina in a trifling conversation, he placed himself by her enraptured cousin; who, led on by his ridiculous flattery, continued singing sentimental ballads and romances, until Perceval’s fine musical ear and correct taste were tortured nearly to agony point, and he thought he must have left the room to escape from Miss Belinda’s screaming. He was saved by an explosion from Miss Rocket.

“You seem, Belinda, quite to forget that you are not the only musician in the room.”

“Georgina, will you sing, *now*?” said Belinda, with marked emphasis on the *now*; for she had previously begged Mrs. D’Esterre to be her second in a duett, which she once more placed upon the music desk.

“We have had music enough for this evening,” observed Perceval, thrown off his guard, by the excessive state of irritability his nerves had been put into.

“No;” rejoined Miss Rocket, with more truth than good breeding, “we have had no music at all; there has been plenty of screaming, and noise, and nonsense, but not one note of music; so Georgina, you must gratify me by singing your father’s and my favourite air; only that one, I will not ask for more: it is late, and Lord Olivius Yerfourd has, I believe, some distance to go.”

Georgina obeyed; but, disheartened by Perceval’s remark, acquitted herself badly. Rebecca

had chosen the air our heroine sung, at her father's instance, the evening previous to her marriage, and now repeated, in presence of those who had so often listened before, her thoughts reverted to old times—her ear lost its accuracy—her voice its power. Perceval, too, remembered that evening, and, full of vexation and annoyance, regretted he had not even then broken off the engagement. But vain were such regrets—he had connected himself, irrevocably connected himself, with a set of low-born people—he had married a woman with a whole host of vulgar relations, and who, in the irritation of his present feelings, herself appeared but one degree less vulgar and ill-bred.

But the next moment D'Esterre thought differently. Lord Olivius Yerfourd, as Georgina concluded, addressed to her one of the absurd sallies which had so much enchanted her foolish cousin, and the modest dignity that marked her manner, as she repelled this impertinence, struck even her fanciful, fastidious husband, who saw

and understood, although too far off to hear, what passed.

“No, no,” he said mentally; “whatever they may be, *she* is not vulgar—far from it. Georgina is a beautiful creature, even graceful and elegant; and if she could but be separated from these odious relations—and time will do that—time does everything.”

Lord Olivius Yerfourd turned towards a stand of flowers, and, breaking off a rose, offered it to Belinda. She placed it affectedly in her bosom.

“Do you know those lines, beginning ‘Beauty crept into a rose?’” she enquired of Lord Olivius.

“No, I have never seen them; whose are they?”

“Shakspeare’s, I believe.”

“Shakspeare! Oh no,” said Perceval, “those lines are not Shakspeare’s.”

“Then,” replied Belinda, “perhaps, they are Moore’s.”

“Hardly ;” observed Theresa ; “they are of older date ; and by a mind of a very different stamp—you are also wrong in quoting that line as the first ; it occurs towards the middle of the verses.”

“Whoever be the author, the idea is pretty,” remarked D’Esterre.

“Yes,” rejoined Lord Olivius, “beauty’s resting place should be the sweetest and the softest.”

Belinda fancied this remark contained a compliment to her, and, with an air of silly consciousness, answered—

“Don’t you doat upon roses, Lord Olivius ? Oh I’m sure you do—poets are all so fond of roses.”

“I am not a poet.”

“Oh, yes you are ; I am confident you are—you look like one.”

“Do I ?” he enquired, smiling. “And may I ask what peculiarity marks the outward bearing of the poet, so that you may distinguish him from other men ?”

“What peculiarity?”

“Yes. What does a poet look like?”

“What does a poet look like? Why like a poet, I suppose,” replied Belinda, looking herself exceedingly like a fool. “And then they have all the same tastes—delight in moonlight, and nightingales, and roses.”

“Yes,” exclaimed Miss Rocket, “beauty creeps into a rose—love nestles in a rose—Philomel delights in roses. For my part, I like them well enough, particularly cabbage roses: still, I must confess, I never found anything in a rose but earwigs.” And having delivered herself of this observation, Rebecca walked towards the piano, and remained busied in turning over the leaves of the music book, at the same time humming,

“I’d be a Butterfly,”

so very audibly, that Perceval became apprehensive she meditated concluding the day’s performance with a specimen of her vocal powers, and he felt quite relieved when Lord Olivius

Yerfourd shewed tokens of an intended departure. In taking leave, however, he intimated his hope of paying a visit of enquiry on the following day; and, the ladies having retired, Perceval remained in the drawing-room, brooding over his annoyances, and planning a *lionising* excursion, that might ensure the absence of his guests from home, at the time the threatened visit was likely to take place.

CHAPTER XI.

SHORTLY after Georgina had begun the duties of unrobing, Belinda, looking peculiarly solemn, entered her dressing-room, and, in a mysterious low tone of voice, begged, that, if possible, Mrs. Price's services might be dispensed with, as she wished to consult her cousin on a subject of the most vital importance.

"Certainly," replied Georgina; "Price, you may go—I shall want nothing more—good night."

Price lingered in the room as long as she possibly could, and then withdrew; not, how-

ever, without, according to the common custom of waiting women, pausing for a few minutes outside the door, which was closed as lightly as might be. But her curiosity was not gratified, for no sound reached her well practised ear; Georgina brushed the long glossy ringlets, that now floated on her shoulders, while silently awaiting the important communication Belinda had announced, but which for some minutes she seemed unable to disclose. At length she exclaimed in those heroic tones she was in the habit of assuming when she wished to be unusually interesting—

“Georgina, my sweet Georgina, how great is your happiness!”

“Yes,” said Georgina, rather dryly, “I have many blessings—I ought to be very happy.”

“Yes, yes, surrounded by luxury, married to the Lord of your affection—adored by him—what an enviable lot is yours!”

Georgina made no reply: for, although Belinda’s two first assertions were correct, with

the third, it was far otherwise : she was far from being adored by her husband—was she even loved ?

“ Oh,” pursued Belinda, with a sigh that almost put the candle out, “ that my lot held out a promise of equalling yours ! But alas, alas, disappointed love is all I have to look to ! ”

“ What do you mean ? Has Mr. Pratt — ”

“ Do not mention him,” cried Belinda with a look of disgust, “ he is unworthy of the name of man, a disgrace to the whole sex ! ”

Georgina’s dark eyes opened wide with astonishment. “ How ? What ? I thought you seemed much pleased with him : and Miss Rocket tells me he has been a good deal at Atherley since I left it—on your account, of course.”

“ Oh, yes ; he has been there, much—too much ; and, I blush to own that, for a time, his presence was not unacceptable to me : but that was before, before—”

“ Before what ? ” interrupted Georgina,

rather alarmed at Belinda's excited tone and manner.

"Before I knew what the wretch is, what he is capable of, the cruel part he meant to act by the miserable Belinda!"

"What part? What has he done, my dear cousin? Belinda, do, do explain, you quite terrify me."

"Georgina," said Belinda, with the utmost solemnity; "I will own every thing! yes, I will confide all my misery, my weakness, for you will soothe and sympathise, I know."

"Pray, make haste," said Georgina, "it is very late."

But Belinda resembled a German postillion, there was no getting her on.

"You know," replied Belinda, "that we met, first, in town, and he appeared all devotion; he followed me to Boulogne, afterwards to Atherley, and then persisted in the same course, notwithstanding the discouragement he met with."

“ You discouraged Mr. Pratt ? ” asked Georgina with some surprise.

“ Yes—no—not absolutely discouraged ; I was weak, and he wicked. We met clandestinely ; and—and—in short, I suffered him to inveigle me into an engagement.”

“ An engagement of marriage ? ”

“ Yes, the villain practised upon my feelings : nor was it until I was fairly entrapped that I discovered how grossly I had been deceived.”

“ What can you mean ? ”

“ Oh, Georgina, this Pratt, this wretch, is not what I believed him, honourable, and noble, and everything a woman wishes for ; but he is a—a—”

“ A married man, perhaps,” enquired the perplexed Georgina.

“ No, Georgy, not a married man, but—but a—fishmonger ! ”

“ A fishmonger—a fishmonger ? is Mr. Pratt a fishmonger ? ”

“Don’t say the horrid word so often.”

“But is he really one?”

“Yes, the audacious creature is actually a fishmonger!”

“And, do you mean that he keeps a shop, and sells cods-heads and shoulders?”

Belinda was too much offended to reply; and Georgina, amused at this conclusion to Belinda’s romantic views, could not forbear adding, “If he be really a fishmonger, his name should be *Spratt*, not Pratt.”

“Do not insult me,” said her cousin; “had you been forced to become a fishmonger’s wife, instead of Mr. D’Esterre’s, you would not have thought it any laughing matter.”

“But,” rejoined Georgina, recovering her gravity, for it really was no subject for a joke; “you are not, surely, serious, when you talk of marrying Mr. Pratt.”

“Indeed, I am, perfectly in earnest; I see no possibility of escaping my dreadful fate.”

“Is the engagement irrevocable?”

“ Quite,” replied Belinda, woefully ; “ my doom is sealed, I must give my hand to one I hate.”

“ Hate ?”

“ Yes ; hate, loathe, detest.”

“ But you used to rave about him. I’m sure, I never cared half so much for Perceval before we were married, as you seemed to do for Mr. Pratt.”

“ Yes ; but that was before I knew he was a fishmonger.”

“ Surely, Mr. Pratt will not insist on your adhering to the engagement against your wishes ?”

“ He does, he does. When, in my just indignation, I desired him to leave my sight for ever, the audacious wretch reminded me of my promise, and, when I told him that nothing should induce me to fulfil it, he threatened to sue me for a breach of promise of marriage. Oh, Georgina ! Think of being brought into a court of justice, and sued for

a breach of promise of marriage by a fish-monger!"

"He will not do it, my dear Bell, rely upon it; the threat will not be acted upon. Such things are never done."

"Oh, yes, they are, in to-day's paper there was an account of an action of the kind; Lord Olivius Yerfourd and Mr. D'Esterre began talking about it just before the former went away, and turned the poor girl into such ridicule. I declare, I got so hot I thought I should have fainted."

"But that was quite another case; there, the lady, whoever she was, sued the gentleman—men never prosecute in such cases."

"Pratt will," said Belinda, sullenly. "He says he has taken a house and furnished it, and told his friends, and that he won't be made a fool of."

"Have you consulted anybody?"

"No; the dreadful secret rests with you."

"Why was there so much mystery?"

“ I cannot tell. Pratt told me that, for family reasons, the engagement must be kept private at first.”

“ And yet he has told his friends ?”

“ Oh, that was quite lately ; he obtained his father’s consent, published the engagement, and wrote to me to do the same ; but, in the meantime I had received an anonymous letter that roused my suspicions ; I desired an interview, he came to Atherley, we met as usual in a field behind the orchard, and there I learnt the dreadful truth.”

“ How does it happen you never suspected Mr. Pratt’s low origin ? I should have thought his language would have betrayed it ?”

“ Oh, he has been well educated ; at least, he was at Winchester on the foundation, and even went to college, for his father meant him for the law ; but he got into some scrape, was expelled, and then put into the business. Is it not dreadful ? What do you advise, Georgina ?”

“ That you should speak to Maurice without

delay. It is the mystery and secrecy with which you have been induced to act that has led to the entanglement; had there been no concealment, on your part, there would have been no deception on his; his trade and connexions must have been discovered, and probably this it was that induced him to bind you to silence."

"You are a poor comforter, Georgina."

"Maurice will prove a more efficient one: entrust him with your distress without delay."

"I dare not."

"Nay; he is so kind and affectionate, and has always proved himself the best of brothers."

"I cannot; he would be so angry with me for meeting Pratt privately."

"Even if he were, what is a temporary burst of displeasure compared with an unhappy and unsuitable connexion?"

"But I promised Maurice to discourage Gustavus. I denied that I ever met him alone,

and, if I acknowledge that I have done so, it is convicting myself of fibbing."

"It is a very sad business," said Georgina, shocked at Belinda's duplicity, and want of proper feeling and decorum.

"It is, indeed, a hard fate to be obliged to bestow my hand upon a fishmonger, when it is quite clear I might marry a lord; for what is fifteen hundred a year, and a villa at Camberwell, compared to being Lady Olivius Yerfourd?"

"My dear Belinda, there is not the slightest chance of your ever being Lady Olivius Yerfourd, there is not, indeed."

"You say so," observed Belinda, sneeringly; "because you think no one but yourself can make an advantageous match—but I have good reason for knowing the contrary. Did you not remark with what alacrity he rescued me from the—the stream;" (Belinda did not think *ditch* euphonious,) "his anxiety to remain, and his whole behaviour—the promised visit for to-

morrow—what are they but tokens and evidences of his fervent attachment?”

“Whatever Lord Olivius Yerfourd’s feelings may be,” replied Georgina, well aware that, if once Belinda fancied she had made a conquest, the endeavour to persuade her to the contrary was perfectly hopeless, “I am quite certain he has not the remotest intention of making you his wife. He is, it is well known, over head and ears in debt, and can only marry a woman of fortune; so pray do not suffer your mind to cherish any such foolish expectations.”

“There is Mr. D’Esterre,” said Belinda, coldly; “may I entreat you will not betray my secret?”

“Of course, I will be strictly honourable,” replied Georgina; and she kept her promise with more fidelity than is generally the custom with married ladies. To say the truth, there was little temptation to do otherwise; for, in addition to the want of confidence

always existing between her and her lord, Perceval was in no humour to invite disclosures. All men have a dislike to female closettings, and his objection was not diminished by the reflection that the interesting creature, *en bonnet de nuit*, whom he saw issue from Georgina's dressing-room, was one of Maurice Arnold's sisters.

CHAPTER XII.

THE following day proved sufficiently fine for the expedition Mr. D'Esterre had planned, but it was not destined to take place. Theresa, certainly, was able, and even anxious, to see all that could be seen; but Miss Rocket's ankle was worse, and her whole frame so stiff from the pinching and dragging she had undergone that perfect quiet was indispensable; and, to Perceval's horror, she even hinted an apprehension that she should not be equal to moving for a month. Belinda, also, was feeling the effect of a cold bath; she had got what

is vulgarly called a crick in the neck, and, as she sat, her head drawn on one side, her eyes swollen and heavy, her nose flaming and her large cheeks increased to double their usual magnitude — D'Esterre thought her the most vulgar, disgusting looking creature his eyes had ever chanced to light upon.

As neither of these unfortunates was in a state to brave the outward air, Perceval could only make his own escape ; and, with Theresa on his arm, he set off for the haunted well, leaving Georgina to nurse the invalids and entertain their expected visiter, who, true to his promise, for his own amusement was in question, accompanied by Sir Allan and Lady Alicia Stuart, came a short time previous to the luncheon hour. Lady Gertrude had preceded them, and I leave my readers to imagine the indignation and disdain that took possession of her bosom, that curled her pointed nose and upper lip, when she beheld how, and by whom, the drawing-room, where once she had presided,

was occupied ; and the look of gall and worm-wood with which she scanned the intruders.

Poor Georgina spent a very disagreeable morning : she saw, clearly enough, that her relations were objects of contemptuous ridicule to her titled neighbours, and of something more to her ill-natured mother-in-law. She could not conceal from herself that, although Perceval had not expressed his opinion of the virgin trio, it was anything but favourable.

The following day Lady Gertrude inflicted upon them her unwelcome company at dinner. As may be supposed, the conversation between a group of persons so dissimilar was not particularly interesting ; and D'Esterre, dreading a repetition of Belinda's screaming, proposed, by way of prevention, that Theresa should favour them by reading aloud a portion of an unpublished work of hers. After some display of real humility, she consented to submit her work for their amusement, but absolutely declined to be herself the lecturer. The poem was, there-

fore, given to Georgina, who our readers will remember read well, and on the present occasion exerted herself unusually, to do justice to her friend's performance.

It was curious to watch the countenances and bearing of the different listeners. Belinda, all stolid indifference, for the composition was above the level of her mind—the sentiments were too refined—the style too chastely elegant. A trashy novel or an improbable romance would have suited her better. Perceval, on the contrary, was really interested ; he saw, at a glance, the work was of a superior cast, and his natural good feeling biassed him in favour of the author, whose quivering lip, flushed cheek and hurried respiration, sufficiently evinced her painful anxiety to meet the approbation of her hearers. Even Rebecca, after professing to dislike poetry even more than novels, thought it necessary to say something encouraging. Not so, Lady Gertrude, she was, in fact, the very quintessence of ill-nature ; perhaps, had never done or said a

kind thing in her whole life. Besides, although herself, quite insensible to the merits of the work, she had a high opinion of Perceval's judgment, and she knew by her son's manner that his praises were sincere; Theresa's poem was, therefore, decidedly a work of merit, and, as such, likely to be successful; and, totally ignorant of the difficulties of authorship, Lady Gertrude, by a very unusual effort of her torpid imagination, pictured to herself Theresa crowned with a poet's bays—the object of popular admiration, and reflecting a portion of her own eclat upon Georgina, the despised Georgina, for she, of course, would be considered as the author's patroness. No such honour had been enjoyed by Lady Gertrude, and she could not endure the idea of being equalled or surpassed in any way. Thus, sharpened by envy, her ill-nature even outdid itself.

There is nothing easier than to depreciate works of the imagination: before we venture to criticise those on history, political economy,

natural philosophy, or even travels, it is necessary that we should, in some measure, understand the subject treated of in either—lest, in endeavouring to point out errors in another, we only display our own ignorance. But the veriest dolt in life may pick holes in writings of a lighter description, whether prose or poetry. The reception such productions meet with is altogether matter of taste ; it is, therefore, quite enough to say, “I do not like it ; it does not suit me ; I am not interested ;”—and the thing is done. No one can blame you ; tastes differ—opinions, we all know, are various—you shew no ignorance, nor even presumption, for it is only a poem, or a novel, on which you sit in judgment—and any one is competent to criticise such frivolity. If opinion flows very strongly in the opposite channel, you can qualify your censure by infusing a few admissions of merit, and it needs very little skill to do this in such a manner as shall vindicate your claim to candour, and at the same time injure the work

—not much perhaps ; ill-natured aspersions are seldom durable in their effects—but still you have wounded the author's feelings—you have done all the mischief in your power—you have gratified the spiteful inclination of your heart ; your end is answered, you have committed an unkindness, and what more pleasing to an envious mind ?

Forgive me this digression, gentle reader ; the object of my present writing is to depict envy in its many and varied workings ; and Janet Irving is not the only one of those, who figure in these pages, whose mind is tainted by this despicable passion.

Lady Gertrude was unsparing in her censures. In deference to Perceval's opinion, she, certainly, allowed Theresa some measure of talent—admitted that her work shewed taste and feeling ; but then the poem exhibited so many faults, the metre was so objectionable, the rhyme so badly chosen, so much of everything, in fact, there ought not to have been—such an

absence of regularity—it fell so far beneath the expectation she had formed, she really hoped Miss Flagge would not think of publishing it. Such was the opinion Lady Gertrude expressed—and it was envy—mean and contemptible envy which dictated the ebullition.

Belinda seconded the dear old lady; unable to comprehend one line in ten she had been listening to, she found the greatest difficulty in keeping her eyes open; and she did, as many other stupid people do—affected to condemn what was, in reality, above her understanding.

Theresa, timid both from nature and position in life (those whom the world frowns upon are rarely self-confident), listened in meek silence to the distressing discussion; but, at length, unable to conceal her agitation, rose hastily and left the room. Georgina would have followed, but was detained by Miss Rocket's asking, in a very pointed manner, whether she remembered the fable of the pig and the hedge-hog?

“No;” she replied in rather a deprecating

tone, for she thought Rebecca's open nostril and unusually crimson cheek foreboded an explosion of feeling whose effect it was impossible to foresee.

"Then listen," said the angry Miss Rocket, still addressing Georgina. "There was once a pig who, happening to stray beyond the farm-yard, saw near a hedge something that looked like a heap of dead leaves, or, perhaps, a lump of mud; we all know a pig's propensities, that his great delight is to burrow his nose in mire—and this pig was like other pigs, only that he was more blind and stupid than even pigs usually are: so, without further reflection, he made up to the place, and darted his long nose forwards, but he had good reason to repent his folly—for the dead leaves turned out to be a hedge-hog, asleep; and piggy wiggy got so many sharp pricks that he never forgot it: and, it is said, was remarkable for cleanliness of taste ever after."

Lady Gertrude had watched Theresa's de-

parture with exultation, and, full of triumph at her imagined superiority, it never occurred to her that anybody would venture to pronounce *her* either impertinent or unfeeling : still less presume to administer a rebuke. The look of self-complacency, therefore, that was apparent on her sharp thin features, gave way, merely, to one of contempt, at the vulgarity of Miss Rocket's simile, as, screwing up her mouth, and mincing her words until they were hardly intelligible (a manner Lady Gertrude invariably assumed when she wished to appear particularly lady-like and refined), she expressed her total inability to comprehend the application of the fable.

“ I will explain the fable ;” replied Rebecca, “ and then its application will, I dare say, be clear enough.” (Another imploring look from Georgina, but all in vain, Rebecca would not see it.) “ By the pig, we must understand those persons who, fancying themselves superior to all the world, are always ready to find fault with everything and everybody ;

particularly when they think they may do it with impunity: but, as the animal in the fable ran his nose into a hedge-hog's back, instead of a heap of mud, so it sometimes happens that, in place of timid submission, there may be a reprisal. There are plenty of human hedge-hogs; people who are quiet and harmless enough, if left alone, but whom it is very dangerous to irritate; so dangerous, indeed, that no one blessed with common sense would think of doing anything so foolish. Does not your ladyship agree with me?"

Lady Gertrude's mouth dropped, and her two little grey eyes shot sparks of fire; but Rebecca was glance proof, and she continued, looking steadily at the angry old lady.

"Perceval, Perceval, pray —," (am I to be insulted in this manner, she was going to add, but her son's back was turned, and his countenance, reflected in one of the mirrors, bore an expression of excessive amusement. Seeing, therefore, that an appeal to him was not likely

to avail much, Lady Gertrude determined upon making a dignified retreat, and therefore concluded her appeal to Perceval by desiring her carriage might be brought round.) “She was tired to death, she must return home.”

Petty trials often fret the temper in a greater degree than actual suffering; and impertinence, still more than either: I consider the person who can bear impertinence unmoved, to possess a very enviable state of mind. Theresa, however, could not—she spent a restless, feverish night; while Rebecca, who felt herself insulted, through her friend, had the nightmare, and dreamt she was going to be married.

“Pray, Georgina,” said Perceval, when they were alone; “does your friend write prose as well as poetry?”

“Oh dear, yes; she has written a great many things.”

“What sort of things?”

“Tales and fragments, and —”

“Is she satirical?”

“ She can be.”

“ Then, I think, Lady Gertrude stands a good chance of figuring in her next work, and what is more, she deserves it.”

“ Oh, Perceval, I hope not. Lady Gertrude would be so much annoyed, for Theresa can draw very absurd sketches, and quite true to life.”

“ What a fool my mother is !” observed Perceval, with more truth than filial reverence. “ Who, but she, would have run the risk of provoking a quarrel where she must come worst off ; and for no earthly purpose but to gratify her ill-nature, or display her fancied superiority, hurt the feelings of a person who, in all probability, will retaliate by holding her up to ridicule.”

“ I scarcely think Theresa would do that.”

“ She belongs to a class of beings whose sensitive feelings render them proverbially irritable—she grasps a powerful weapon, and it is hardly to be expected that, if wantonly attacked, she will hesitate to defend herself.”

“ Oh, dear, I hope not,” thought Georgina. “ Lady Gertrude would dislike me more than ever, if one of my friends were so to annoy her.” And then Georgina thought how great a pity it was that Rebecca had irritated the old lady by telling the story about the pig, and she trembled as she looked forward to the morrow.

CHAPTER XIII.

BUT Rebecca, shrewd and sensible—well versed in human nature, though so ignorant of life, understood Lady Gertrude D'Esterre's character far better than her daughter-in-law. That amiable person belonged to the nettle tribe, which, as my readers, perhaps, know, stings those only who do not grasp it boldly:—and when the first ebullition of temper passed off, far from resenting Miss Rocket's plain dealing, she crouched before the spirit which she felt was more than a match for hers. And, not content with treating the party with infinitely

more civility than before the affair, actually carried her politeness to the length of an invitation to dine at her house; a mark of attention that had the effect of bringing their visit to a conclusion.

Even Belinda, whose vanity had been severely galled by some strictures Lady Gertrude D'Esterre thought proper to pass upon her dress, declared her willingness to return home; for the charm of being in Lord Olivius Yerfourd's neighbourhood was no counterpoise to the horror of a dinner, a family dinner, with such a hostess. Perhaps, if Lord Olivius Yerfourd had shewn any very warm inclination to cultivate an intimacy with Miss Arnold, or had his lordship been expected among the guests, Belinda would have forgiven the imputation cast upon her taste by Lady Gertrude; but as neither was the case, she made not the slightest objection to her aunt's suggestion, that, on the day previous to that mentioned in the note of invitation, they should take their departure;

Belinda and herself for Atherley ; Theresa, for the great metropolis ; and, on that morning, the same elegant equipage (Miss Rocket resolutely refused to trust herself again to Mr. D'Esterre's coachman,) which brought them to Ringland, conveyed them once again to the neighbouring town.

“What a lovely place ! how happy Georgina must feel herself ;” said Theresa, whilst they drove through the grounds, her heart sinking at the prospect of London, with its smoke and fog—its noise and bustle—its crowded streets, and dismal houses ; and, to a friendless stranger like herself, its utter desolation.

“Humph,” replied Rebecca ; “Georgina has a fine house, and a carriage, and all that sort of thing ; but I question whether, after all, she would not rather be jogging back to Atherley with us, than seated up in that gay drawing-room, where one always feels as if walking about in a china shop.”

“Don't you think she is happy ?”

“How can she be with such a mother-in-law? Besides, I doubt whether she and Mr. D’Esterre get on very well together, or, indeed, whether they ever will; she is too much afraid of him, and nothing is more likely to produce discomfort in a married life. Let a man only see that his wife looks upon him with such feelings, and the chances are ten to one that he will take advantage of it. Lady Gertrude, too, treats her as if she were no better than a fool or a child, and Georgina submits where she ought to resist.”

“Oh,” cried Theresa, “everybody must be afraid of Lady Gertrude.”

“Not *every body*!” said Miss Rocket, drawing herself up.

“I can’t say I’ve enjoyed my visit very much,” observed Belinda.

“Nor I, either, I am sure,” replied poor Theresa. “And yet in such a lovely spot, and with so many comforts, how happy one might be.”

“Aye,” rejoined Rebecca, “but remember

that nappiness dwells in persons, not places ; and I again repeat I fear there 's not much there, pretty though it may be."

Rebecca was correct in her suspicion ; whilst Mr. D'Esterre joyfully tendered his assistance in packing the ladies into their most inconvenient vehicle, and uttered his farewell with a degree of satisfaction he could with difficulty conceal, the tear that sprung to Georgy's eye, as she saw her friends depart, had in it quite as much of yearning for her old familiar home as of regret for their society.

Their withdrawal proved the signal for Lady Gertrude to disburden herself of the ill-temper she had been forced, in Miss Rocket's presence, to restrain ; and Perceval, worried out of all patience, discovered he had business in London that required his immediate personal attention ; and forthwith he set off, via mail, leaving Georgina entirely at the mercy of her mother-in-law ; who, as if to make the infliction more complete, disposed of her furniture

and transferred herself to Ringland. Happily, the evil was not of long duration; the day fixed upon for their removal to London came, at length—came as a day of jubilee, both to the nominal mistress of Ringland, for Georgina was, in truth, no more; and to each individual menial in the establishment.

CHAPTER XIV.

ONE of Lady Gertrude D'Esterre's fancies was to travel slowly. She professed herself unequal to more than thirty miles a day; and, as Ringland was eighty miles from the capital, they were to sleep two nights on the road, and did not leave home before the post hour.

Georgina had been vainly endeavouring to suit Lady Gertrude's tea to her fastidious fancy (it is no trifle to make tea for a captious old woman, who has long been accustomed to prepare it for herself); and, vexed and wearied, anxiously waited the termination of the meal,

when the servant entered, bearing the contents of the letter-bag; some newspapers—a note for Lady Gertrude—a letter for Georgina. Without the least hesitation, Lady Gertrude seized upon the latter.

“For my mistress, my lady,” said the servant; “for Mrs. D’Esterre.”

“Are you sure it is for Mrs. D’Esterre? let me see—ah, so it is;” and very reluctantly she replaced it on the salver.

Georgina’s countenance brightened — the letter was from Atherley—instantly she broke the seal.

“Georgina,” said Lady Gertrude, “I perceive that you are not aware, it is not considered well bred to open and read a letter in the presence of other persons; especially, without going through the ceremony of asking permission. *I*, you must have observed, have not opened mine. I do not wish to impose any unnecessary restraint upon you, but to give some little insight into the manners and cus-

toms of good society. If your letter had been from my son, there might have been some excuse for your eagerness—but the communication of a mere acquaintance—however, read it now, I merely wished to point out your error. Pray don't let me interrupt you."

Georgina apologised, and laid down her dispatch, but it was from Atherley—from home; it brought tidings of her father—and, although the commencement was in Belinda's handwriting, it was too tantalizing to see it by her side, and still unread; and almost unwittingly she plunged into its contents.

"My dear Georgina," wrote Belinda, "I know not what you will think of me; whether I shall be condemned as the most versatile of human beings, or considered the most unfortunate, when you learn that the crisis of my fate is near at hand—my destiny will quickly be achieved—my doom for ever sealed. Yet, my Georgina, what a destiny—what an ignominious destiny! In a short, a very short time the wretched Belinda becomes the wife of—of Pratt—the wife of Pratt! Mrs. Gustavus

Pratt ! Was there ever such a dreadful name ? How all this has been brought about, and what the means resorted to, to bend my feeble will—I cannot now disclose. You shall hear all when we meet, which will be, I trust, ere long ; for the marriage is to take place almost immediately, and, as we are to reside in London, we shall, of course, be constantly together. One thing I have insisted upon, that Gustavus shall withdraw from business as speedily as possible ; and, in the mean time, he will be but little at the warehouse. It may be all very well for his father to spend his life looking over the books, and ascertaining how many turbots and mackerel they dispose of—but for *my* husband such an occupation would be out of the question. I have also stipulated that an application be made to the Herald's office respecting a coat of arms ; my Aunt Rocket proposes three sprats, with a lobster for a crest ; and for a motto 'Sprats make Prats.' Did you ever hear anything so shocking ? But enough of this ; I am going into Marston to shop—so I will conclude.

“ Ever your affectionate,

BELINDA.”

[“ P.S. Does Lord Olivius Yerfourd ever call at Ringland now ? I forgot to tell you that, when we

were dining out, the other day, and some fish was offered me—I could not command myself; but blushed the deepest crimson—and when the lady of the house was asked if a London fishmonger supplied her table—I trembled lest she should say ‘yes,’ and that his name was Pratt!”

“MY DEAR GEORGINA,

“I have been teasing Belinda, for the last half hour, to make over her pen to me; and yet I know not why I am so anxious to write to you, for, excepting that your father continues as well and cheerful as could reasonably be expected, when separated from his dearest Georgina, I have nothing pleasant to tell you. Belinda’s marriage is anything but gratifying to us. We dislike the connexion, and still more the man: but, with her accustomed imprudence, she has committed herself so seriously that Maurice, and indeed all our friends, consider it next to impossible to break off the engagement. Our only hope is that, as Mr. Pratt certainly admires her exceedingly, and there appears a prospect of every comfort (for he has an excellent income), the marriage will prove less unhappy than she, at present, affects to apprehend. To say the truth, I think her reluctance not altogether genuine, and, could she but be quite convinced of the in-

difference of a certain Lord Olivius Yerfourd, she would view Mr. Pratt with the same favourable bias she did, previous to her meeting with that fascinating nobleman. Still, it is a disagreeable business; and, unhappily, we have another and deeper cause for anxiety than even this unpleasant connexion; our beloved Maurice is in a precarious state; he has, you know, never enjoyed robust health, and, latterly, the rupture of a small blood vessel on the lungs has given rise to the most serious apprehensions. For some time, he concealed this terrifying circumstance, but the increasing languor and debility awakened our fears, and we were gradually made aware of his danger. The case is not considered hopeless, but, for the present, all exertion must be avoided, the duties of his profession suspended, and next winter must be spent abroad. Next winter! Oh, how presumptuous it appears to calculate upon a period thus remote — when in a world of such oft recurring change that we know not what a day—an hour, may bring forth.

“My dearest Georgina will not be offended if I tell her, I think Major Berrington is a little disappointed he has received no invitation to come and witness his beloved child’s happiness. I maintain that you consider such an invitation quite super-

fluous, that a father is always welcome and expected in his daughter's house; but, although outwardly agreeing with me, I see, he is not himself convinced—therefore, you will do well to propose a meeting when next you write, and let that be soon; your letters are always looked for with the greatest eagerness, and as there can be no difficulty about franks, you need never delay writing until you have enough to say to make your dispatch worth postage.

“ Ever your truly affectionate,

Atherley, Tuesday.

“ CHARLOTTE ARNOLD.”

Many and frequent changes flitted across Georgina's countenance whilst perusing Charlotte's communication. Surprise at Belinda's marriage, vexation at the prospect of all that marriage would entail. Deep, heartfelt grief for Maurice—and painful self-reproach that she should, even in appearance, be neglectful of her father.

Lady Gertrude observed all this; and, laying down a piece of thin, half buttered toast, sat, with her little keen eyes fixed peeringly on the

agitated girl. Georgina started as she met those ugly eyes—and, hastily folding up the letter, asked if Lady Gertrude would take any more tea. Lady Gertrude glanced in silence at the full cup that stood beside her, while Georgina coloured at her inadvertency.

“Your letter is from Atherley, I presume?”

“Yes ; from home.”

“Home !” thought her ladyship ; “aye, where the heart is, there will be the home.” Then, aloud, “You have good accounts, I hope?”

“My father is much as usual,” replied Georgina.

“What does that mean? What do you intend to express when you say that Major Berrington is much as usual?”

“That he is always a partial sufferer.”

“In what way? pray tell me ; perhaps I might suggest something that would prove useful in his case.”

And Georgina, for the twentieth time, related every circumstance of her father’s affliction.

“Oh,” said Lady Gertrude, as she concluded, “Major Berrington suffers from ophthalmia—a very unpleasant complaint, certainly; and, at his age, I believe, not often cured; indeed, I have known more than one instance where total blindness has been the result. Major Berrington should have the best advice. Who attends him?”

“Papa has no regular physician.”

“He is wrong, he should put himself into the hands of the first practitioner. Pray say so when next you write.”

“The expense of constant medical attendance would be, I fear, beyond my poor father’s means, at present.”

“Ah, true. I had forgotten—Major Berrington is in needy circumstances; he is, therefore, quite right in avoiding all unnecessary expense. Still, advice is of great importance, and I should think that, were his case fully known, some one would attend him gratis—you know, medical men are proverbially

charitable. If you like, I will speak to Cookham—Cookham will do any thing for me; he has, I find, a cousin living somewhere near Atherley, who would, I dare say, attend your father for nothing, or, at any rate, for very little; and, although he is only an apothecary, he might be useful,” said Lady Gertrude; without, however, having the slightest intention of doing as she proposed.

“Oh, no,” cried Georgina, “pray do not. My father needs no such assistance; when he wishes for advice, my cousin, Maurice Arnold, is too happy to afford it.”

Georgina’s lip quivered as she mentioned Maurice’s name; an indication that was far from being unobserved by her scrutinising and suspicious listener.

“What is Mr. Arnold? an apothecary?”

“No; a physician.”

“At Atherley?”

“No; he practises at Marston, a town five miles from thence.”

“In much practice?—I suppose not; if he were clever, he would hardly settle down in the country.”

“He wished to be near his family.”

“Ah, yes, I suppose he is a brother of that—that young person who was here and dressed so strangely.”

Georgina’s reply in the affirmative was followed by a brief silence. But Lady Gertrude had not as yet discovered the clue to Georgina’s agitation, and she would not let the subject drop.

“Is there a probability of any of that party visiting London?”

“I hardly know. Yes, I suppose one of my cousins, at least, will be in town.”

“One—which one?” sharply enquired Lady Gertrude.

“Belinda, the one who was here.”

“Belinda! and what, may I ask, takes her to town; not again to force herself into my son’s house, I presume?”

“No;” replied Georgina, in a more spirited tone than she usually adopted towards her mother-in-law. “Belinda will intrude herself into nobody’s house—she will be in her own.”

“Oh, is she then going to be married?”

“She is.”

“And the name—may I ask the name?”

“Pratt,” said Georgina.

“Pratt? not a bad name. Any relation to Lord Camden?”

“No,” replied Georgina; “I have not heard that there is any connexion with that family.”

“Is it a good match? I mean, is the gentleman in easy circumstances?”

“He is in business,” said Georgina, colouring violently.

“Business? What business?”

“Something in the city.”

“Oh, then, I suppose they will live on the premises?”

“No; Mr. Pratt has a house somewhere in the neighbourhood of London.”

“Humph,” thought Lady Gertrude; “house in the neighbourhood of London—very dangerous indeed; invitations to spend long days, walking about the grounds—meet the old lover there.” Then, aloud, “Her brother will hardly be able to leave his patients, I conclude, or he would be with his sister?”

“Maurice has been obliged to relinquish his profession for the present.”

“He is, then, an idle man? that is bad at his time of life—it should not be suffered.”

“It is unavoidable.” Then, in a husky voice she read the paragraph from Charlotte’s letter.

Lady Gertrude was satisfied. Georgina’s agitation had been accounted for; and she had only to indulge her natural unkind propensity, by dilating on his danger—expressing her confident opinion that there was not a probability of his recovery; and this style of conversation was persevered in until Georgina, completely overcome, rose from the breakfast table, and hurried into the open air.

“You will catch cold!” cried Lady Gertrude: but the warning was unheeded. Her ladyship then rang the bell, and dispatched a servant to inform Mrs. D’Esterre that the carriage was coming round immediately, and Lady Gertrude begged she would lose no time in equipping herself.

Georgina obeyed; and, with worn spirits and drooping heart, took her seat in the chariot that was to convey her from one costly mansion to another. Smaller, indeed, and less pretending in every way than Ringland, but still replete with tasteful elegance and wisely chosen comfort.

I will not describe that wearying journey, the stiff uncomfortable meal, the tedious evening spent upon the road; nor relate how Lady Gertrude talked on incessantly; how often Georgina pressed her hand upon her eyes to repel the tears that would gush forth, as her companion continued to prognosticate a fatal termination to Maurice Arnold’s illness, and total blindness to her father. All

persons know what it is to travel, how delightful in congenial society, and all persons could, I suppose, equally imagine what a journey with Lady Gertrude D'Esterre for sole companion must be.

But "Time and the hour wear out the longest day;" and postboys and horses brought, at length, this real exercise of patience to a close—and Georgina's heart beat, and her eye recovered somewhat of its wonted brilliancy, as the carriage stopped at the door of a moderately sized house in Upper Grosvenor-street. After a separation of ten days, she was again to meet her husband.

She was, however, mistaken; no Perceval advanced to hand her from the carriage, or bid her welcome. They reached town about three in the afternoon, and D'Esterre, not calculating on their arrival at so early an hour, was from home; nor did he return for some time. Georgina walked slowly and sadly up stairs: she remembered, in passing Hyde Park,

she had seen, at a distance, a gentleman riding by the side of a carriage, who strongly reminded her of her husband ; and though, in truth, she was the least exacting of human beings, she could not but think he might, for once, have foregone his ride and stayed at home to welcome and receive her—while Lady Gertrude, as tenacious of her dignity as a republican, or lady's maid, felt highly offended at her son's want of due respect ; and when Georgina, after spending as much time as possible in throwing off her bonnet and shawl, returned to the drawing-room, she found her mother-in-law seated bolt upright, having chosen the smallest and least commodious chair in the apartment—unemployed and looking very acetous.

Georgina glanced timidly round the room, then placed herself at no great distance from her agreeable companion. She would gladly have whiled away the time in examining the many tokens of D'Esterre's taste that lay scattered in every direction ; but Lady Gertrude's

presence forbad any such display of natural curiosity. There were also books of all descriptions, but Lady Gertrude chose to talk, and Georgina could not choose but listen. She had asked for her work-box, but she asked in vain. Mrs. Price saw no occasion for unpacking more of the contents of the imperial than would be absolutely necessary for the dinner toilet; even that, need not be done for some time yet. Georgina, therefore, was deprived of the feminine resource of making holes in a piece of muslin, and drawing her thread backwards and forwards; and so thoroughly vexed and wearied did she finally become that, when, in answer to Lady Gertrude's summons (repeated about every quarter of an hour), the servant appeared, and, after professing his entire ignorance of his master's plans, gently closed the door, she really almost wished herself a footman, for he, at all events, could escape from Lady Gertrude.

At length, the clatter of horses' hoofs was

heard, followed by a knock at the street door ; Georgina caught the tones of D'Esterre's well-known voice, his footstep upon the stairs, and advanced to meet him ; not, however, with all the alacrity she would have shewn two hours before.

" Why, Georgina," he said, as they turned to re-enter the apartment, " you are not looking well—anything wrong—what's the matter ?"

" Nothing, nothing at all ; I am a little wearied, it will soon pass off."

" Bored to death with my mother, I suppose," muttered D'Esterre, more than half aloud ; never, for an instant, suspecting how greatly his thoughtlessness had deepened the shade upon his young wife's brow, or how much heart-heaviness had taken from her usual elasticity of gait.

Lady Gertrude, also, had risen to meet her son ; but, catching his last words, remained stationary in the middle of the room, looking like a petrified vinegar cruet ; and received his filial salutation in solemn silence.

Then came the usual questions ápropos of travelling. Where they had slept? How been accommodated? State of the roads, &c.: all of which Lady Gertrude did not condescend to answer; and Georgina's replies were short and unsatisfactory. To be called upon to give an opinion upon the most trifling subject, in Lady Gertrude's presence, was always a penance to her.

D'Esterre opened and read two or three letters they had brought from Ringland, then, looking at his watch, observed it was time to dress for dinner, and they separated. The meal passed heavily, Lady Gertrude continued sullen, and Georgina taciturn. Perceval, at length, wearied of home, "of wife and mother tired," suddenly recollected that a celebrated *danseuse* was to make her début at the Opera that night, and, bidding Georgina "take care of herself," transferred himself to a more genial scene; leaving the ladies to amuse each other.

Lady Gertrude's astonishment at this fresh breach of filial attention was only equalled by her displeasure; and, no longer maintaining the silence of offended dignity, she poured forth a variety of prophetic observations on the dissipated manners of the day, that were but ill-calculated to re-assure a wife already trembling for her husband's love. But, however wounded by Perceval's indifference, Georgina could not bear to hear his misconduct reprobated, or his principles impugned. She endeavoured therefore to advance, on his behalf, many an excuse, which her own heart told her was but too probably untrue.

Lady Gertrude, irritated by opposition, persisted in her strictures; and when the usual hour for retiring arrived, had nearly talked herself into a fever. Georgina, wearied and exhausted, laid her head upon her pillow, and sought to banish from her recollection the remembrance of D'Esterre's neglect and thoughtlessness. Alas, the other subjects which came

thronging to her mind were scarcely less distressing—Belinda's marriage, and her residence in town—Maurice Arnold's mortal illness—and her beloved father, pining for her society, but whom she dared not venture to invite beneath her roof, in sad succession came before her, until, at last, she fairly cried herself to sleep.

CHAPTER XV.

AND Perceval was at the Opera, applauding—admiring—criticising the several performers, and bowing to more than one fair occupant of the various boxes. Amongst these, were Janet and Lady Kingsbury. D'Esterre had gone to the theatre without the slightest intention or wish to meet Miss Irving—but once there, and recognised, it was hardly possible to leave the house without informing her of Georgina's arrival in town, and, for that purpose, meaning to remain but a few minutes, he entered the box. She greeted him with the affectionate

cordiality becoming their relationship, made the proper enquiries for her sister and Lady Gertrude, expressed her purpose of calling early the ensuing morning; then, turning towards a gentleman who had followed Mr. D'Esterre into the box, began a lively conversation. Perceval would have made his escape; but Lady Kingsbury had seen some rare old china that morning, she wished to purchase it, but could not quite decide upon giving the required price, and with the utmost earnestness she now sought Mr. D'Esterre's advice and opinion. Lady Kingsbury was rather a wordy person; and while she detailed with great precision her ideas of the beauty and various other merits of the porcelain, her wishes for its possession, with her anxiety to make a good bargain, Perceval, although apparently giving all his attention to her, was, in fact, listening, and with no slight interest to Janet's lively, entertaining badinage; and, after Lady Kingsbury had exhausted her breath and subject,

after promising himself to endeavour to negotiate the business—he was still there, still listening to, and finally, taking part in the conversation.

Whilst waiting for their carriage, they were joined by Sir Marcus Kingsbury.

“Are you going home?” he enquired.

“No,” replied Lady Kingsbury, “we are engaged to Lady Charlotte Desmond’s ball. Won’t you come?”

“Why yes, I may as well look on for half an hour.”

“Mr. D’Esterre, there is a vacant seat.”

“Are you going my way?”

“To Lower Brook-street.”

“Pray, Marcus,” enquired Lady Kingsbury, after the opera and different performers had been discussed, “who is that strange looking person you spoke to as we came out?”

“That——oh——Mrs. Gosford; Alfred Gosford’s wife. D’Esterre, you know Alfred Gosford?”

“Hardly. I knew his brother intimately;

we were at Christchurch together. *He*, poor fellow, was drowned."

"Yes; and by his death Alfred came into so large a fortune he fancied there would be no end to it; and so contrived to run himself out before he had been five years his own master."

"How very reprehensible," observed Lady Kingsbury.

"Yes, it was a foolish piece of business, and now I think he has done worse."

"How?"

"He has gone and married a woman whose relations he is ashamed of."

"I thought," said Janet, "Mrs. Gosford had been an heiress? I am confident I heard something of the kind."

"So she was; at least, her father left her fifty thousand pounds, and she will have twenty more when her mother is kind enough to depart."

"Then why are her connexions so objectionable?"

“Because old Brereton married beneath him, his mother’s cook, I believe ; and in consequence was cut by all the other members of the family.*

“Was she actually a cook ?”

“So it is said. Talks of travelling in a *Brisket*—and all that sort of thing.”

“A very disagreeable connexion, indeed,” observed Perceval. “But I suppose they don’t see much of her—keep her in the back ground, of course, as much as possible.”

“Quite the reverse : for, unfortunately, the money is entirely in her own power. So Gosford

* What is the reason that when a gentleman chuses to vex his relations and lower himself by marrying a servant, he almost invariably selects the cook ? We rarely, or never, hear of a gentleman espousing a lady’s maid or housemaid ; but it is by no means unusual for the cook to be promoted to the head of the household ; and yet, she is, certainly, not the most interesting member of the establishment. I am no admirer of serving women’s charms ; I can see beauty in a gipsy or a peasant girl, especially if, as in Wales, there be an attempt at national costume : but the vulgar, would-be, finery of servant maids is particularly revolting to my taste. Still, I must acknowledge, I *have* seen a lady’s-maid look very like a lady ; and I have also seen a pretty, extremely pretty housemaid—but a cook—a cook—who ever met with an attractive cook ?

is obliged to pay the old lady all sorts of civilities. She was with Mrs. Gosford this evening."

"I saw," said Janet, "a very singular looking person in a red and yellow turban—was that Mrs. Brereton?"

"Yes. What with her size, and flashy dress, I never see her without thinking of some great balloon."

"Is the daughter amiable?"

"A perfect Xantippe. Gosford is worn to death with her."

"In what way?"

"Jealous—won't let him even look at another woman."

"I'm glad she's not my wife," said D'Esterre, quickly.

"You would not like Georgina to be jealous?" asked Janet.

"Nothing would annoy me more—it is a sort of thing I could not tolerate."

"If I," cried Sir Marcus, "were married to

a woman who thought fit to give herself any jealous airs, by Jove, I would soon shew her the outside of the street door."

"Hush, hush, Marcus," rejoined his mother.

"It's really very lucky, *I* am not married to either of you, gentlemen," observed Janet, with a degree of effrontery which astonished Lady Kingsbury.

"*You* would not, surely, be weak enough to give way to such paltry feelings, Janet?" replied Perceval.

"I cannot answer for myself. At any rate, I lean to the opinion that there can exist no strong affection without jealousy; therefore—were I married to a man I loved, I fear I should sometimes offend on that score."

"Then you would do foolishly, very foolishly," said Perceval with emphasis. A woman who gives way to jealousy only bores her husband, and perhaps drives him to conduct which, but for her ill-humour (and all jealous people become ill-tempered) he never would have dreamt of."

Janet carefully treasured up this observation of D'Esterre's.

"What a fine woman Lady Marsden is," remarked Sir Marcus, who was, in common with the generality of very young men, an amateur of full blown roses.

"My dear Marcus," said Lady Kingsbury, very much afraid her son might be entangled by Lady Marsden, "she is old enough to be your mother."

"Lady Marsden is not to my taste. Too much embonpoint to please me," observed Perceval; while Janet reflected exultingly, that her sister's beauty was of the same cast as Lady Marsden's, and might one day become liable to similar animadversions.

"Won't you come in for a few minutes?" she asked, as Perceval handed her from the carriage.

"No—I am homeward bound."

"Afraid of being lectured?"

"Bah!" He replied, in a tone by no means

well assured ; for he could not but feel he had in some degree deserved it.

“ Janet, where are you ? What has become of Marcus ? ” enquired Lady Kingsbury.

“ Indeed I don’t know—oh—there he is, in the refreshment room.”

“ Sir Marcus and Lady Kingsbury,” shouted the different officials, whose place it was to announce the guests.

“ Where is Marcus—where is Marcus ? ”

“ Just within that door ; I saw him a minute ago.”

“ Dear, how tiresome ! He always runs away. Do try if you can’t catch his eye.”

“ Sir Marcus and Lady Kingsbury,” was again vociferated, as the two ladies, deserted by their knight, began ascending the staircase. Sir Marcus looked up from the refreshment room and nodded to his mother, who at first received his salutation with some gravity ; but he was talking to the wealthy daughter of a noble

house, and maternal pride triumphed over maternal displeasure.

"Sir Marcus and Lady Kingsbury," was a third time repeated, as Janet and her aunt reached the reception room, and one or two groups of persons gave evidence of an incipient inclination to smile.

"I wish now, I had made Perceval come in," said Janet.

"Perceval is much better where he is," replied her aunt, "married men have no business at such places at all. I don't think he ought to have been at the Opera to night. Oh—General Tufton, how glad I am to see you."

"Miss Irving," said one of the young ladies of the house, "the Duke of L—— desires an introduction."

Janet could hardly forbear starting with pleasure and astonishment. The Duke of L—— was decidedly the most exclusive young man of the day—had never been known to dance but once, and then—with a royal princess—and now, he wished to dance with her. A quadrille, too, what motive could he have? She knew his Grace perfectly by sight, and once had dined in

company with him ; but the hope of attracting the notice of one thus fastidious appeared so chimerical she had never entertained it—and yet, he actually sought an introduction. Janet's ambitious spirit towered, and her heart bounded, as they took their places amongst the dancers—and her partner's first remark gave still greater exultation, and made her heart bound higher yet.

“I think I saw you at the Opera?”

“Yes, we were there ; Grisi was very fine to-night.”

“Was she? I only came in for the ballet ; and I didn't stay that out, I was in a hurry to get here.”

“Why that haste?” thought Janet ; but she could not express her curiosity ; his Grace was walking through his portion of the dance.

“Yes,” he resumed, “I wanted to get here. I don't often come to such places ; but there's a person I wish particularly to meet, and as they told me all the world was coming, I thought it possible she might be among the croud.” (Janet's eye glistened. Could *she* be the object of the Duke's pursuit? If not, why

had he singled her out from amidst the myriads of lovely and high-bred women, who graced the assembly?) "But I might have spared myself the trouble—I don't see her, or anything like her," rejoined the nobleman, after a slow survey of the room, and Janet's cheek grew pale.

"Is it impertinent to ask this lady's name?"

"Name?—Oh no. It's a young married woman, who I'm told is singularly beautiful—something one seldom meets with, at least in England. Oswald raves about her—you know Oswald?"

"I am acquainted with a gentleman of that name; Lord Hilpington's eldest son."

"The same—a most excellent fellow."

"Mr. Oswald appeared a very gentlemanlike man."

"He was at Eastbeach last Autumn, where it seems this Mrs. D'Esterre was."

"Mrs. D'Esterre!" exclaimed Janet, turning almost white.

"Yes; I'm told she was nobody, no connexion, no family—but beautiful, exquisitely beautiful, and D'Esterre fell in love with, and

married, her. It's a pity though ; D'Esterre is a good sort of fellow, but can't be rich enough to marry for love. Did you ever see him ?”

Janet made an effort—“ Frequently ; I am acquainted, even connected, with Mr. D'Esterre.”

“ Then, I suppose, you know his wife ?”

Another effort—“ Mrs. D'Esterre is my half-sister.”

“ Indeed ! Then, I dare say, there is not a word of truth in Oswald's story,” coolly replied the Duke ; and then handed Miss Irving to her seat, with as much unconcern as though he had said nothing that could distress her feelings, or mortify her pride.

“ So, we are *nobody*,” thought Janet ; “ and his Grace is willing to believe the report of Georgina's beauty unfounded, simply because she is my sister ; and moreover, has the ill-breeding to inform me of it—impertinent, conceited, overbearing coxcomb !”

Miss Irving's next partner was a Mr. Bingley, a gentleman of good fortune, whose estate lay in ——shire, at no great distance from Ringland. He was quite as sensible, and far less affected

than the majority of young men of his age and standing in the world, but excessively shy and awkward. During Miss Irving's visit at Ringland, he had been much taken with her plausible manners and ladylike appearance. The impression had been strengthened rather than diminished by time, and as, in point of fortune and connexion, she was a perfectly eligible *partie*, he merely awaited a favourable opportunity to avow his love ; and, perhaps stimulated by the Duke's example, he resolved no longer to delay making the declaration. His opening observation was not, however, greatly to the point.

“ How did you like your late partner ? ”

During the dance, Janet had seen Mr. Bingley hovering near her, and thinking it just possible he suspected the Duke's impertinence (a surmise strengthened by a certain degree of awkwardness he evinced in addressing her), resolved to do away with the impression, and replied in a firm tone of voice——

“ I think the Duke of L——quite delightful. One of the pleasantest men I ever met with.”

“ Indeed ! I never heard his Grace so highly

spoken of before. He is not usually considered clever."

"Because he is so little known."

"He has been fortunate enough to please you, at any rate."

"Yes; and I am so difficult to please."

"Are you?" he asked, with interest.

"Indeed, I am excessively fastidious."

"And no one but the Duke of L——can reach your standard?"

"I will not say that, exactly."

"Has no other person ever chanced to interest you?"

"Can he mean Perceval?" thought Janet angrily. And she answered quickly in the negative.

"I grieve to hear it," rejoined her companion; but in so low a voice that it was lost on Janet, who, little suspecting Mr. Bingley's intentions, gave herself no further trouble about him.

After the quadrille had broken up, their passage through the rooms was obstructed by two ladies, whose conversation Miss Irving could not avoid hearing.

"You heard of the Duke of L—'s wager?"

"I suppose you mean his dancing?"

"Both; for one was the consequence of the other."

"How?"

"I don't know all the particulars: there was some altercation between the Duke and Lord Westleigh, which ended in a bet on the Duke's part, that he would not only dance (I believe Lord Westleigh had said he could not) but chuse for his partner the ugliest girl in the whole room. They say, Lord Westleigh will lose some thousands."

"Nay, I saw his Grace's partner: she was certainly far from being the ugliest girl in the room, I thought her decidedly pretty."

"So Lord Westleigh says; while the Duke maintains, that beauty is entirely matter of opinion, and that in *his* opinion, Miss Harding (I believe that is the name) is without doubt the ugliest woman here."

"What could induce the Duke to make so ridiculous a bet?"

"The love of notoriety, I suppose. Some people will do anything to get themselves talked of."

“And how will it be decided?”

“The whole matter is referred to arbitration. Six umpires, three chosen on one side and three on the other, are to sit in judgment on the lady’s charms.”

“How very unpleasant—poor Miss Harding!”

Never was pity more loudly called for: scarcely could Janet support herself, so much was she distressed by all she had been overhearing. She looked cautiously towards her partner; but he, full of his own scheme, had evidently not profited by the unpleasant disclosure. This conviction, in some measure, reassured her, until, turning her head in the contrary direction, she perceived Sir Marcus standing close at hand, and evidently in possession of the whole story. Far from sympathising, he drew near and said in a tone of mock condolence——

“Sad business, Janet—very provoking indeed. But never mind, *beauty*, you know, *is matter of opinion*. I dare say, there are plenty of men, who would shew better taste than the Duke of L——. Besides the verdict may be in your favour, after all.”

“If this had happened to Georgina,” thought the irritated Janet, “how very differently would Marcus have conducted himself!”

“Miss Irving, I fear I may appear presuming; yet, if I might entreat—” said Mr. Bingley, making a decisive effort.

Janet fancied he wished to join the waltzers, and, quite beside herself with vexation, cut him short by saying, pettishly, “Indeed you must excuse me—I cannot possibly; pray conduct me to a seat, I am dreadfully fatigued; the most unpleasant evening I have ever spent.”

“She understands my meaning,” thought the mortified young man; and from that moment all idea of marrying Janet Irving vanished from his brain.

Lady Kingsbury greeted Miss Irving with much complacency; indeed, what chaperone would do otherwise than smile upon the recent partner of a Duke? besides, she had penetrated Mr. Bingley’s motives; and Janet, likely to become the wife of a man of good fortune, was a very different person from Janet, her ladyship’s protégée; and, in some respects, depend-

ent relative. She took an early opportunity of imparting her discovery.

“My dear Janet, I congratulate you; Mr. Bingley is certainly in love; admires you exceedingly, and, with a little management” (Lady Kingsbury had a great notion of management in such matters, and, perhaps, she was right); “with a little judicious management, I have no doubt will make an offer. We must take Georgina into our confidence, as Mr. Bingley and Mr. D’Esterre are very intimate.”

“Oh no, no, pray say nothing to Georgina—to anybody.”

Lady Kingsbury looked surprised. “Why conceal from your sister a circumstance that must give her so much gratification?”

“Because she would tell Perceval—I’m confident she would. Married women tell their husbands everything.”

“I see no great evil if she does: Mr. D’Esterre might do us an essential service. In such matters, one man has often immense influence over another. I think it very expedient he should be told.”

“No, no, not for the world,” cried Janet,

still so greatly agitated that she scarcely knew what she said. "Besides, there is no foundation for the surmise—there is not, I assure you; Mr. Bingley has not, and never had, the remotest idea of marrying me. Pray say nothing to Georgina."

"Humph," thought Lady Kingsbury; "what is the meaning of all this? why is D'Esterre to know nothing of Mr. Bingley's admiration? Can it be?—No, no, that is impossible—in love with her brother-in-law?—I cannot believe it: still, I wish I had not left her at Ringland. His coming to the Opera and remaining so long in our box, the very first evening of his wife's arrival in town, was certainly singular—I must look to this. She may think it all very well to marry Marcus, and be attached to Perceval for all that; such things have been. Oh, that I never had undertaken the charge of such a girl; the anxiety she causes me will bring me to my grave; and there appears no probability of my getting rid of her."

Influenced by these suspicions, Lady Kingsbury watched Miss Irving narrowly—perhaps it was well for Georgina, she did; but Janet

chafed at a surveillance that she was well aware sprung from suspicious vigilance, not affectionate solicitude.

When also the flutter of her spirits had subsided, and she could calmly contemplate the circumstances of the evening, she became convinced that, for once, her aunt had been more clear-sighted than she; and joyfully would Miss Irving have recalled her heedless petulance—her ill-considered words. But it was too late—the gentleman was fairly off, and nothing remained for her but to deplore her folly. Yet, even here, the natural bias of her temper shewed itself. It was Georgina's superior good fortune that had marred hers; but for Mr. Oswald's absurd and extravagant description of her sister's beauty, the Duke of L— would not have honoured Lady Charlotte Desmond's ball with his illustrious presence; she could not, therefore, have been made the luckless subject of his silly bet; and, with unflattered spirits—free from unpleasant impressions, would quickly have perceived, and warmly seconded, Mr. Bingley's wishes. Yes, in every way Georgina had crossed her path.

From this period, Janet's heart became, if possible, still more closed against each good and Christian feeling; and she offered no resistance to the fiendish disposition that enthralled her—she struggled not to break the chain that held her bound and miserable. A well-regulated, religiously-instructed mind had shrunk in horror from the sinful feelings Janet fostered, and gave way to; but in all her education, self-government had been omitted; and for religion—light indeed were Janet's opinions on that subject. To appear once on the Sabbath at a fashionable chapel, dressed in the highest point of elegance; to kneel, or sit, or stand with graceful ease, or studied attitude—to repeat a few hurried words morning and evening (that is to say, when time allowed), and once or twice a year to approach the communion-table, thus was her duty to her God performed. And towards man—she considered that, in bestowing on the clamorous mendicant, who stood at the shop-door, the heavy coins she would have found it troublesome to carry, she absolved herself from every obligation to her fellow mortals. Such was Janet Irving's code of faith and

practice—and there are, I much fear, many, whose ideas upon this subject are not more true or better founded.

On the morning following her arrival in town, Georgina awoke with a severe headache.

“Ah,” thought Mr. D’Esterre, “now for a fit of temper; in a woman, head-ache and ill-temper are synonymous. What a fool I was to marry!”

Perhaps, too, remembering how much Miss Irving had amused him on the previous evening, he also thought that the folly would not have been so great, had he preferred the elder to the younger sister.

He was, however, quite mistaken in his calculations. It is true, Georgina keenly felt his unkindness and neglect; but it was not in her nature to resent his conduct, nor even to reproach him in the most gentle manner. Perhaps it had been better if she had expressed her sense of D’Esterre’s carelessness; at any rate, such an exhibition of her feeling would have led to greater caution on his part in future. As it was, he thought she looked pretty, very pretty

in. her simple cap and robe de chambre—prettier, perhaps, than he had ever thought before; very good-tempered likewise, more so than many wives would have shewn themselves under similar circumstances—but he neither gave her credit for the sense she really possessed, nor for the affection she entertained for him.

Still, Perceval was glad to escape a scene: and he descended to the breakfast-room, gaily singing one of the airs he had heard on the preceding evening, and resolved to make amends for his recent delinquency by spending the remainder of the morning in Georgina's dressing-room.

Very different was the greeting he received from Lady Gertrude; and long and biting the lecture administered by that respectable old lady. Perceval studied the newspaper, according to the well-bred practice of English gentlemen, drank his coffee, hastily swallowed the other accessories to his breakfast, and shewed a disposition to make his exit, before his mother had half concluded her harangue.

“Stay,” cried she, “Perceval, I charge you, stay. I have yet something further to com-

municate, and I must insist upon your serious attention, for it regards a subject that may affect all your happiness."

"Speak on then," said he, impatiently.

And Lady Gertrude proceeded to unfold the history of the letter; Georgina's agitation, Maurice Arnold's illness, which she now pretended to consider as a feint, in order to procure his freedom from the shackles of his profession, and the power of seeking that society he most delighted in — his probable séjour in town, and all the evils likely, or even possible, to result from the intimacy between him and Georgina.

Mr. D'Esterre's, as I have before observed, was not a jealous temper; and he could not view the matter in the serious light his mother did. He was wearied with the subject—looked on it as an old wife's tale, not worthy his serious attention. The only fruit, therefore, of Lady Gertrude's solicitude was, that, worried by her lecturing, instead of spending the morning quietly at home, according to his original intention, he walked down to Tattersall's, and made some extremely foolish bets, by which, eventually, he became a considerable loser.

CHAPTER XVI.

IT was yet early in the day, when a simply-dressed female approached one of the houses in Portland-place, and, after knocking timidly, enquired, in a yet more hesitating manner, for the lady of the mansion.

“Mrs. Daymour is not at home,” saucily replied the footman, while nearly closing the door.

“I am here by appointment; be good enough to give my card to Mrs. Daymour,” urged the applicant, at the same time proffering a card.

The man took it with some reluctance, and, after pausing for a moment, as though he were considering whether she should remain standing

on the steps, or be admitted within the hall, motioned to her to enter, and strode up the spacious staircase.

A friend was spending the morning with Mrs. Daymour. Both ladies belonged to that grade in society which ranks immediately below nobility; they were richly, if not elegantly, dressed, and everything in the apartment betokened affluence and comfort.

"How very tiresome," cried Mrs. Daymour; "I really ought to have written, and spared myself the trouble and annoyance of seeing this person. Why did you let her in? I desired to be denied."

"She said she came by appointment, ma'am."

"True; I believe she is correct—really, I should have written."

"Will not a message do?" said Lady Broughton.

"Hardly; messages are so seldom accurately delivered. Where is she?"

"Waiting below, ma'am."

"Is Mr. Daymour within?"

"No, ma'am; my master went out an hour ago."

“How provoking! Well, shew her into the library, and say I will come down and speak to her.”

The servant retired.

“Some unworthy applicant for my friend’s bounty, I conclude from her perseverance?” observed Lady Broughton.

“Not exactly that, but something quite as unpleasant. The fact is, I have, unfortunately, a sister living in Cornwall, who is in want of a governess, and wrote to me to engage one for her.”

“It certainly is one of the greatest drawbacks to residing in town, that all your friends and relations seem to consider your time and trouble as public property; in short, that you have no earthly thing to attend to but their commissions.”

“Which, by the way, are often impossibilities. People living in the country, form strange ideas of what may be done or bought in the metropolis.”

“And, when you have taken all imaginable pains to please them, are as certain to be dissatisfied as the sun is to rise to-morrow.”

“ Which, however, does not prevent another, and, probably, speedy application. I quite dread hearing from my country friends.”

“ Assuredly, it is very provoking to spend hours, and wear out your carriage wheels and horses, buying articles that might be purchased just as well at the neighbouring town. And after all your trouble to be told, that the ribbon and lining for Caroline’s bonnet do not match ; or, that the lace for trimming baby’s cap is too narrow ; or, Eliza’s German wools not the right shade. Persons who live always in one restricted circle of society learn to attach so much importance to trifles.”

“ But all this is nothing to hiring a governess or lady’s maid.”

“ Oh, I really think, I should decline doing either one or the other.”

“ Such has often been my resolution, which I keep until the next letter from my sister begging my services.”

“ Has she had much trouble with her governesses ?”

“ A great deal : my sister usually changes her governess once in six months, if not oftener.”

“How very trying!”

“Especially for the purveyor.”

“She, perhaps, requires a great deal.”

“Quite too much. Every accomplishment, good principles, pleasing manners, and a low salary.”

“It must, indeed, be difficult to execute such a commission.”

“Absolutely impossible. I was quite wearied of the search, and after seeing a variety of young persons (*ladies* they style themselves), not one of whom appeared likely to answer, in a fit of despair, I resolved to close with the next offer, be it what it might.”

“Was it at all promising?”

“No; that is to say, the young woman professed very little, would not undertake either music or dancing; but I engaged her, for I felt she was, perhaps, likely to do quite as well as any other; she would, at any rate, remain her quarter, and then receive her dismissal as her predecessors have done. She was willing, moreover, to pay her journey backwards and forwards; and, if my sister found her inefficient, the disappointment would be of

less consequence ; besides, I find she has been living in our part of the country, which rather interests me in her favour. But, unluckily, after everything was settled, and nothing remained but for my sister to fix the day for her journey, I heard of another person whose application I cannot possibly refuse ; and now I must inform this lady that her services will be dispensed with."

" Very unpleasant, indeed."

" Exceedingly, and as Mr. Daymour is from home, if she should take it into her head to be impertinent, I shall really not know what to do."

" I should hardly anticipate that, but it is a disagreeable thing to be obliged to forfeit an engagement."

" Very, I told my housekeeper she ought to have mentioned Miss Doughty sooner."

" Your housekeeper? Is it on her recommendation you engage governesses?"

" Not always," replied Mrs. Daymour, smiling. " In the present instance, the fact is, one of my trades-people has a daughter educated for a governess, who has applied for my sister's situation ; and as her father is an extremely

civil, accommodating sort of man, I do not like to disoblige him by a refusal—you know, my dear Lady Broughton, it is not pleasant to quarrel with anybody.”

“Certainly not,” replied her ladyship, while she internally subjoined, “especially where the immediate payment of a bill might be the inconvenient result.”

“And this makes me nervous about meeting this person—I mean the individual I first engaged; she may think proper to make a scene, a thing I dislike above all others—I really wish I had thought of writing, but, to say the truth, this ball of Lady D—’s has put everything else out of my head.”

“What a delightful ball it was, all was so well arranged.”

“Charming: but I must not keep this person waiting any longer. Will you excuse me for ten minutes?”

“By all means.”

In obedience to Mrs. Daymour’s orders, Theresa had been ushered into the library. To one of her habits and turn of mind no spot could have been more congenial, but it was

painful to be thus surrounded by all that was so interesting, and still to feel herself unauthorised to gratify her inclinations by inspecting more closely the many costly volumes which, in rich binding, lined the book-shelves : and yet, in all probability, she would have felt their value far better than the actual owner.

How strange, at times, appears the inequality of wealth ; and how perplexing to the thinking mind the manner in which the blessings of this time-state are often meted out ! Profusion to the few—want to the many—sorrow and suffering to the wise and good—to fools and knaves prosperity. In truth, the way and manner of God's providence will ever prove a labyrinth, whose mazes reason may not enter, or, she will lose her way. Faith, faith alone, can safely tread those mystic paths, for she looks beyond this fleeting life ; her steady eye, fixed on eternity, can penetrate and see the hidden wisdom that directs the whole ; and, though she may not comprehend, she yet can love, and worship, and adore.

Then let not the believer murmur—let him not doubt the goodness of his Almighty God ;

rather let his faith wax strong, although his reason faint — this seeming partiality in the allotment of terrestrial good affords a striking argument in favour of a future state.

“I am really much distressed,” observed Mrs. Daymour, in a hesitating manner, to Miss Flagge; “really quite concerned — pray be seated, but—but—at the time I entered into an engagement with you, I was not aware that I had already compromised myself in another quarter; and, as that young person appears more likely to suit my sister’s wishes, I am afraid it will be impossible to—to ratify your engagement.”

Theresa was thunderstruck: she believed the arrangement (as indeed it was) to be complete. The disappointment and surprise, therefore, with which she now learnt its entire termination kept her silent for some seconds. Mrs. Daymour, in full anticipation of a violent, perhaps even abusive, protest against the injustice of her proceedings, laid her hand upon the bell string;—but Theresa, downcast, and broken spirited, far from resisting, submitted without a deprecating word. She did, indeed,

glance downwards at the new silk dress she had purchased on the faith of the engagement ; while the tear-drop, that unbidden fell and then lay glittering amidst the close folds of her sober-coloured garment, caught Mrs. Daymour's unwilling attention, extorting pity from a heart but seldom open to suffering not immediately its own, and she regretted the unfeeling part she had been led to act.

There was, however, no alternative : it would be absurd to run the risk of affronting at once her housekeeper and a tradesman to whom a heavy bill was owing—Theresa must be sacrificed : all that remained was to qualify the injustice as much as possible, and get rid of her victim speedily. A promise to bear Miss Flagge in mind on any future occasion, would, she believed, achieve the first—and a movement of impatience bring about the last.

Theresa coldly thanked Mrs. Daymour for her proffered patronage, and left the house almost heart-broken.

CHAPTER XVII.

THERESA'S history was no uncommon one. She was not, it is true, one of that class of mortals whose path in life is ever tracked by tears, with whom the smile is as a stranger guest, the sigh the close, familiar friend ;—still, much of trouble, much of sorrow and vexation had been hers.

She was the daughter of a Solicitor in very moderate circumstances ; who, dying, left his business to his only son—and twelve hundred pounds to his daughter. At first, she resided with her brother, and, as far as regarded pecuniary matters, felt her father's loss comparatively little. Mr. Flagge, junior, however, unfortu-

nately fell in love, married, and Theresa was fain to seek another home.—She tried boarding in a family soi-disant genteel; but indifferent health rendered this plan exceedingly trying—and she was thus more easily disposed to listen to a proposal made to her by an uncle, who carried on a very extensive, and he affirmed, profitable, business in the metropolis.

“Place your money in my hands, I will allow you twice the interest you now receive, and pledge myself to give you entire liberty to withdraw it at any moment you may think proper.” Thus spoke Mr. Thomas Flagge.

The proposal was tempting—there appeared no reason to doubt her uncle’s probity, or the safety of his house; and, in an evil hour, Theresa acceded to the scheme. For a few years she found no cause to repent of her decision—the interest was pretty regularly paid; and, by dint of strict economy, together with the profits arising from the labour of her brain, Theresa contrived to exist as so many of her description do; that is to say, she dressed neatly—avoided debt—subscribed to more than one charity—and ate about as much as the canary bird, in

keeping which consisted her sole extravagance.

But the fluctuating state of trade put an end to this halcyon course of life. Mr. Thomas Flagge's receipts diminished—ready money became scarce, and he found it more convenient to postpone, than pay, his niece's trifling dividend.

There is something very curious in the opinions people entertain of the relative value of money. The man with ten thousand a year talks of his own poverty; but considers as many hundreds, or even half as many, quite sufficient for his younger brother. Curates, and half-pay officers, to judge by the manner they are paid, have, one might imagine, fewer occasions for expenditure than butlers and men cooks. As for women—(especially if unmarried) they are supposed to partake of the fabled nature of the chameleon, and to live on air.

Mr. Flagge's business had become less profitable than formerly; he made, however, no difference in the quantity or quality of the wine he drank—but he grumbled excessively at the bills for his wife's and daughter's personal expenses—and, in place of transmitting to Theresa her half yearly dividends, promised,

when the crisis should be over, full and regular payments.

The crisis, however, became a catastrophe: one fine morning, Mr. Flagge left his home rather earlier than usual, without announcing any uncommon intention; the dinner hour came and went, but no Mr. Flagge—the night passed away, and no Mr. Flagge: his wife became extremely alarmed, so did many persons who had dealings with his house. The lost gentleman was talked about, enquired for, advertized—but all in vain—no tidings reached his anxious family. Mrs. Flagge meditated weeds, and perhaps a second more attentive spouse, when a letter from New York apprised her that her present lord was still in being. His affairs were, he informed her, in a hopeless, irremediable condition. A few months longer and a disgraceful bankruptcy must have ensued; he had therefore thought proper to transfer himself to the land of freedom, where he wished his family to follow, bringing with them as much of his property as could be quickly got together.

This proved to be nothing: he was declared

insolvent; and his creditors, amongst whom was Theresa, received exactly fifteen pence in the pound. Nor was this her only trial—the bookseller, who had hitherto been her publisher, happened to be one of Mr. Flagge's assignees, and a loser, of course, to a considerable amount by the failure; and he henceforth withdrew the patronage he had, in fact, originally bestowed principally in consequence of his connexion with her uncle. But, as he did not wish unnecessarily to give offence, Mr. Franks couched his refusal of a work she tendered him in the most civil terms, alleging the fickleness of the public taste as an excuse for declining the offer: no one, he assured her, now read such works—poetry would be more likely to succeed. Little did the good-natured bookseller imagine he was writing to a poet—one who considered poetry as her forte; who had already written nearly as many sonnets as Lady — —: who had, at that very moment, lying in her desk, a poem more than two-thirds completed, and only thrown aside because persons, experienced in these matters, had assured her that people were not fond of reading poetry in these degenerate, tasteless days.

It was resumed with ardour—finished—forwarded for Mr. Franks' approval—and refused. Theresa's disappointment was, at first, intense ; for the imaginative writer links himself to the creations of his fancy, until they are a portion of his very being. Gradually, however, new hopes sprung up ; in declining her manuscript, Mr. Franks had spoken kindly of its merits (how often did Theresa read that passage in his letter) ; he said, too, that he never published works of that description ; then, its rejection was accounted for, fully accounted for ; and another bookseller might probably undertake to do what Mr. Franks would not. But to whom should she apply ? And through what medium ? Without a proper introduction would any London bookseller regard her application with a favourable eye ?

These were questions Theresa asked herself and her friends so often that, at length, with the exception of Major Berrington, they came to the resolution that a journey to town and a personal interview would be her best, indeed, her only, plan. To town, therefore, Theresa went, and met with a succession of disappoint-

ments, rendered more keen from the sort of vague hope engendered by the booksellers' promises to look over the manuscript, and undertake it, provided other engagements did not interfere. Thus weeks were spent. Theresa's funds were fast vanishing—she moved into a cheaper lodging—and into a cheaper yet: lived on tea and penny loaves; never left the house except on business, to save her clothes; still her poem was unpurchased, her purse nearly void.

Her endeavours to procure employment, as a governess or companion, proved as abortive as her literary hopes. One application only (to Mrs. Daymour) had succeeded, and our readers are acquainted with the issue of that negotiation. Theresa reached her miserable lodgings nearly beside herself with anxiety and care. She took out her manuscript, resolved to make one more trial to dispose of it, and then—aye and what then? What could she do? Where seek advice or succour? Poor, friendless, miserable Theresa!

Her spirit sickened, her heart grew faint; and, in the wildness of her misery, the wretched being almost wished for death. It seemed at

hand—her health was never strong—imaginative writers rarely have good health: their sensibilities are pitched too high—the ever-working mind exhausts its humbler helpmate; they are their own destruction, like the poor worm that from its entrails weaves its shroud!

Theresa had never enjoyed robust health, and now was sickness added to her many sorrows: anxiety, fatigue, and disappointment induced a severe attack of fever.

For some days her life hung in suspense; and it was doubtful whether she would ever leave the miserable bed on which she lay, ever again breathe the pure air, or gaze upon the cheerful sky. Those, however, whose bodily strength is below par, will sometimes struggle through illnesses fatal to the more robust; and, after three weeks of acute suffering, Theresa was pronounced convalescent, almost well.

Very mournful was her condition; no kind voice whispered words of hopefulness and peace—no friendly hand arranged the pillows, or proffered all those thousand nameless cares, so necessary and so grateful to the invalid: no glistening eye was raised in gratitude to Him,

who had preserved her from the grave. She was unsoothed—uncared for; and she sat alone in her comfortless apartment, the irritability of weakness still upon her; and the imagination, quickened at once and darkened by disease, presenting to her mind every threatened evil in exaggerated hues.

We read sometimes of broken hearts; pretty poetic things, no doubt, and perhaps, true. Broken spirits, at any rate, there are. Oh, yes! the spirit breaks, but not for love. Love is the dream of early youth, and the spirit breaks not then. Youth has in itself the elements of so much happiness; its energy, its hope, its *trust*, its fond belief that every thing is beautiful, that every one is true; and its warm affections, all give a buoyancy, an ever moving principle of joy—and though the spirit bows, it breaks not then.

It is in after years, when stern experience has become our teacher; when the bright glowing hue of hope has passed away, and in its place dark shadows fall; when all life's billows have swept over us, and each succeeding wave has left its furrow on the soul—oh, then it is the

spirit breaks, and all man's boasted energy gives way !

Theresa recovered, but it was only to encounter fresh difficulties ; for the dark horror of imprisonment was hanging over her. Her landlady must be paid ; the surgeon, who had attended her with skill, and even kindness, remunerated ; and her purse contained but a few shillings. She saw no resource but an appeal to friends, whose means, she knew, were little in accordance with their wishes ; and, after many struggles, this step, so repugnant to a mind endued with any sense of delicacy, was resolved upon, and taken, apparently without success. Three days elapsed since that on which she calculated receiving an answer to her application, and no tidings came.

CHAPTER XVIII.

“CHARLOTTE,” said Jane Arnold addressing her sister, on leaving the vicarage at Atherley, where they had been calling—“When you are installed mistress of that house, I hope you will discard those curtains without loss of time.”

“They are not pretty, certainly.”

“Pretty! They are absolutely hideous—yellow, bright yellow—my eyes are nearly put out with looking at them: what could have induced poor dear Mrs. Beechcroft to chuse yellow damask for the furniture of a cottage, for, really, the vicarage is nothing more. She, too, who is, usually, so quiet in her manner and appearance; I should have judged Mrs.

Beechcroft a person of entirely opposite taste."

"A person's taste and appearance do not always coincide. I believe, though, that Mrs. Beechcroft is quite guiltless of the curtains you deprecate so much, I have heard her say, all the furniture was chosen by Mr. Beechcroft, or, rather, by his mother."

"Well, I hope you will speedily dismiss them. Charlotte, will it not seem strange to you to return to that dear old house again?"

"My dearest Jane, I am not going back to it, at least not for, I trust, many, many years."

"Why, Charlotte, when William gets the living, you will, I suppose, set up your staff at the vicarage?"

"You forget, Jane, that before William gets the living, his father will have been taken from us."

"You mean that the good old man must die, before his son inherits his gown and house—but I intend a very different lot for Mr. Beechcroft, that is to say, I expect him to be made a Dean, or Prebend, or, perhaps, a Bishop."

"Most improbable."

"Then, how are you and William to marry?"

“Staverton, will, probably, be vacant in the course of a few weeks, and Lord Lineageleigh gave it, at least, as far as he could give a living not positively free, to William.”

“Together with Atherley, at some future period. But, dear Charlotte, Staverton is but a poor sort of thing, not above three hundred and fifty pounds a year?”

“We shall not be rich, Jane: nor would it, perhaps, be wise to marry on so small an income, did we not look forward to something better—but with Atherley in the back-ground, we shall, I think, do very well; and affection must make up for our deficiency in wealth.”

“Oh yes, people who are in love can live on air, and do all sorts of wonderful things. But, Charlotte, I don’t think you *are* in love. We won’t say anything about William, but you——”

“Why do you doubt my attachment?”

“Because you have none of the signs or symptoms peculiar to the case. You are as calm and placid as the river yonder—instead of which, you ought to be like that little noisy brook, sparkling and overflowing its banks. If

I were in your place, I should do nothing but laugh, and sing, and skip about the house all day long."

"My dear Jane, you are describing joy, rather than happiness—happiness is peaceful and still, both in its nature and expression."

"Then," continued Jane, "at other times you ought to be depressed and miserable."

"Why?"

"Why, for fear anything should happen to break off the engagement: when we are very anxious for the accomplishment of any particular desire, we are always more inclined to fear than hope."

"That is perfectly correct; but, really, in my case there appears so little cause for anxiety—of William's affection I do not entertain a doubt, Staverton will be vacant e'er many weeks are passed, and the present Lord Lineageleigh will, surely, not refuse to ratify his deceased uncle's intention. I know, that, previous to his death, Lord Lineageleigh spoke very strongly to him on William's behalf, both as regards Staverton and Atherley."

"Here is William," said Jane, as William Beechcroft and Maurice joined them.

“Mr. Beechcroft,” observed the younger lady, “how grave and solemn you are looking.”

“I have been engaged in a solemn office, the burial of my friend, my kind old friend——”

“True, Lord Lineageleigh’s funeral took place, to-day: was it very grand?”

“It was an awful and imposing spectacle.”

“I had a great fancy to go, and half persuaded Phœbe she would like it too—but my Aunt Rocket raised a host of objections, so I was obliged to give up my expedition, and content myself with paying a visit of etiquette with Charlotte at the vicarage.”

“Not *etiquette*, I hope;” said William Beechcroft, in an under voice to his intended.

“What made you so anxious to attend the funeral, Jane?” enquired Maurice.

“Oh, I wanted to see how everything went off—whether the chief mourner looked as melancholy as he is in duty bound; if the service were properly performed,” (here Jane looked archly at Mr. Beechcroft) “and, above all, to tell the dear, grim old monuments how much I love them.”

“I think that latter clause the most rational

part of your expedition, at least it is there I could most easily sympathise with you."

"You are partial to those relics of the olden time, perhaps, from the chivalrous recollections connected with them?" asked William Beechcroft.

"No," replied Jane, "not on that account ; but because they do me good."

"Do you good?"

"Yes ; far more than sermons, or lectures, or exhortations. They make me *think*."

"All tombstones should do that."

"Yes, but they don't ; at all events, not in the manner these do. I can look at a modern effigy without being in the least reminded that all flesh is grass."

"I understand your feeling," rejoined William, "for something of the same nature has passed, at times, in my own mind : with all the beauty of modern monumental sculpture, I have often questioned, whether it conveys the idea of death with half the power of the old quaint effigies our forefathers have left us. There is too much animation, too much energy about the later productions of this description ;

it is life, not death, that they pourtray—life, in its struggle with mortality; life, in its resurrection from the grave; life, in its vigour, beauty, strength—the Warrior, the Orator, the gifted child of genius, stand before you, but it is as they were, or will hereafter be—not in their present state. But the older monument, with its perfect stillness, its calm repose, reminds us well of death as represented in the Scriptures.”

“And,” observed Charlotte, “how much more appropriate to a sinful being is the attitude chosen by the elder sculptors—the hands raised, as though imploring mercy, or the feet crossed, in memory of the symbol of our blessed faith.”

“What do you say,” asked Maurice, “to the entablatures covered with elaborate inscriptions, and setting forth in glowing terms the virtues, graces, and accomplishments of the deceased, as though the dust that sleeps beneath had been exempt from all the failings of mortality—and this, in the very Temple of that God in whose sight the Heavens are not pure, and who charges his angels with folly!”

“It is,” said William with emphasis, “an awful desecration, almost a blasphemous asper-

sion of God's truth; for, does not his Holy Word inform us there is none that doeth good, no, not one?"

"We can only hope," remarked Jane, "that as these epitaphs are, usually, put up by the near kindred of the deceased, in the first burst of their affliction, they believe their lost relative to have been really what the inscription describes."

"And what of that, Jane?" enquired Charlotte.

"Why then they are sincere, at any rate."

"My dear Jane," said Maurice, "that is a very specious, and at the same time unsafe, notion—a man may be sincere, yet altogether wrong in his opinions."

"Well," replied Jane, for whom the conversation was becoming far too serious, "when my turn comes, I suppose you will write over me, 'Here lies a Chatterbox.'"

"Jane, do not jest upon so serious a subject."

"Yes," continued the younger Miss Arnold, without heeding her sister's interruption—"I think that inscription will be admirably adapted to me; besides containing two very uncommon characteristics."

“And what are they?” asked Maurice.

“Truth and originality—qualities rarely to be met with in either men, women, books, or epitaphs.”

“Madcap,” rejoined her brother, holding the gate while she passed through.

“Pray, Maurice, don’t you think it rather singular William Beechcroft should have preferred Charlotte to me?”

“No, Jane, if you wish for my sincere opinion, I must acknowledge that I do not; Charlotte is more similar to him in tastes, feelings, and opinions, than you are.”

“That’s the very reason I marvel at his fixing on her. However, it’s very fortunate he did not fancy me, for I never could have married him.”

“Why?”

“Oh, he’s so gloomy, and melancholy, always looks as if he had just been burying Lord Lineageleigh.”

Maurice smiled—“My dear sister, William is sedate, sometimes perhaps, grave, as in my opinion is not unbecoming his profession—but he is neither gloomy nor melancholy.”

“William not melancholy: Just look, I pray you, at his countenance as he turns his head in speaking—and I dare say Charlotte is just the same if we could only see her face, but she looks straight before her, according to the approved custom of girls in love.”

“Perhaps,” said Maurice, “Beechcroft has causes for anxiety, which might make even you look grave.”

Two days after, Charlotte and Jane Arnold sat together, but in a very different state of spirits. Charlotte looked worn and anxious—Jane vexed and sad.

“My dear Charlotte,” she said, taking her sister’s hand in hers, “when I told you, you ought not to feel so easy in your mind respecting your engagement, how little either of us thought that I was speaking prophetically!”

“And yet,” replied Charlotte, “even then something told me there might be truth in your remark; at least, when they joined us, and I observed how very grave William was looking, I felt there must be something wrong.”

“How shamefully Lord Lineageleigh has behaved!”

“Indeed, it would appear so.”

“I wonder his uncle’s ghost does not start up from the tomb and reproach him with his meanness—to sell a living that had been almost given away! I can forgive his not chusing to ratify the promise respecting Atherley, because, as he intends one of his own children for the church, it is natural he should retain the family living for him; but Staverton—it really is too bad.”

“It is a very great disappointment, but I must seek to bear it with cheerfulness—such crosses are always messages of mercy.”

“The engagement is not, however, broken off?”

“No, not yet, William will not hear of that, nor do his parents wish it; but I look upon our marriage now as almost hopeless.”

“I think you had better marry on what you have—William will get something by and bye.”

Charlotte shook her head.

“A long engagement is an odious business,” continued Jane.

“But an improvident marriage worse;” cried Miss Rocket, who just then entered the room,

“and I hope Charlotte will not do anything so absurd and foolish.”

“Oh, no,” answered Charlotte, “I love William too well to be the means of plunging him into embarrassment and trial.”

“Very right, Charlotte—spoken like a girl of sense and feeling; rely upon it there isn’t one man in a hundred whose temper will stand the fuss and worry of supporting and educating a family without the proper means. But I wouldn’t have you break off your engagement—do nothing rashly—wait a little, until we see whether something can’t be done with this Lord Lineageleigh—he ought to be remonstrated with, and told how shamefully he’s behaving. Indeed, I’ve half a mind to go and have a talk with him, myself.”

“Oh, no, no,” exclaimed Charlotte, “pray dont, my dear aunt, I entreat you will not; think of the strange effect such a proceeding on the part of one of my relations would occasion.”

“Well, perhaps it is as well left alone, but I suppose old Mr. Beechcroft won’t sit down quietly, and see his son defrauded in this scandalous manner—Jane, open the window,

and get a glass of water, quick, your sister's fainting."

"It is nothing, I shall be better in a minute, Jane, dearest, lend me your arm."

Jane supported her sister to their joint sleeping-room, and Rebecca remained ruminating on Charlotte's disappointment, and wondering how it happened that a niece of her's should feel that disappointment so severely. After all, Rebecca thought, it was most probably the weakness incidental on a recent attack of fever that rendered Charlotte so easily upset, and therefore, change of air and scene would be desirable; Maurice and she should go together to the sea. And, having come to this conclusion, Miss Rocket set off to visit Major Berrington, that she might inform him of Lord Lineageleigh's shabby conduct, and poor Theresa's most unfortunate condition, "not," said Rebecca, "that he can do any good, for he's not much better off himself, poor man, but it amuses him to hear all that goes on in the world."

"If I were you, Charlotte," again suggested Jane, "I would marry William, notwithstanding-

ing this disappointment: why shouldn't he get on as well as other young men? Think how many people begin the world on no more than you would have, for, of course, Mr. Beechcroft would make his son some allowance."

"This is William's mode of arguing; but, indeed, I cannot, must not, listen either to him or you. My aunt is right, there are few men calculated to bear household annoyances without injury to their cheerfulness and good temper."

"What is the reason men can't submit to inconvenience and privation just as well as we can?"

"Perhaps, because they are by nature formed of less pliable materials — perhaps, because, whilst our education induces habits of self-denial, their's rather fosters those of self-indulgence. And, therefore, it is possible that, in spite of the popular opinion on this subject, there is no actual difference in the degree of happiness enjoyed by the two sexes. If we are called upon to suffer more than men, we are better calculated for endurance. Even the light trivial nature of our occupations, as it enables us to find amusement in mere trifles

which would fail of interesting them, is in our favour; it enables us to turn away our thoughts from causes of anxiety and grief, and to bear privation without murmuring. You know, I always maintain that occupation and happiness are almost synonymous."

"Yes, yes, that is a lesson you have often tried to inculcate on me—but not altogether with success, I fear, dear Charlotte. And now, to return to your affairs—is it not possible that, after all, there may be neither privation nor anxiety to sour William's temper, or affect your cheerfulness? Why should he not get another living? There are other people, besides Lord Lineageleigh, who have livings to give away, and surely some one may be found who will make amends for the injustice he has suffered."

"Alas, Jane, without interest or private friendship, there is, I fear, no hope."

"But he is considered so very clever, and, I am sure, has every other quality to make a good and popular clergyman. Charlotte, do not be cast down, rely upon it, he will find another patron."

"Not if my welfare is connected with his.

William will get nothing while our engagement stands," replied Charlotte, very mournfully.

"What do you mean, my dear sister?"

"That I am one of those persons who are not born to happiness, and therefore nothing in which I am concerned will ever prosper."

"Is not that too superstitious a remark to be the genuine opinion of my sensible Charlotte?"

"Yes, you may chide me for my superstition, nor will I endeavour to defend the weakness it betrays."

"You are exceedingly unwise in harbouring such thoughts, and still more in suffering them to influence your actions. If I were William Beechcroft, I should scold you well."

"I cannot help my folly; I find it, as the French say, 'stronger than myself;' indeed, so entirely has this conviction taken possession of my mind that it was but yesterday that some lines, expressive of similar feelings, were brought as powerfully to my experience as though I had been myself their author, or that they had been composed on purpose to describe my present state."

"What lines?" asked Jane.

“You know them well; indeed, they are familiar to everybody.”

‘Oh! ever thus, from childhood’s hour,
I’ve seen my fondest hopes decay;
I never lov’d a tree or flower,
But ’twas the first to fade away.
I never nurs’d a young gazelle,
To glad me with its soft black eye,
But, when it came to know me well,
And love me, it was sure to die!’

“Yes,” remarked Jane, when her sister had concluded, “those lines are very beautiful. But, Charlotte, why do you apply poor Hinda’s pathetic lamentation to yourself?”

“Because the experience of my life, alas, only too well agrees with hers. To *you*, my mother’s death was comparatively no loss, because you were too young to know her worth, or love her excellencies; *I* could feel and mourn for both. Then Maurice, my twin brother, bound to me by a tie mysterious and beyond the comprehension of such as are not similarly linked, is unhappy, suffering, ill—perhaps—” Charlotte’s voice failed, she could not bring herself to utter the apprehension of his impending danger; it seemed as though to give

the painful thought the form of words would only serve to stamp its greater probability. "And William," she continued, "hardly three weeks ago, how flattering were his prospects, everything promised ease and independence—our engagement had not then begun. It takes place, and suddenly all undergoes a change; Lord Lineageleigh, his friend and patron, dies, not of age or of a lingering malady, but after a few hours' illness his existence terminates, and so unexpectedly that he has no time to ensure to William the living he had promised him—a few words to his next heir are all he can say upon the subject, and those are disregarded. Does it not appear as if my fate had influenced his?"

"I would not suffer myself to think so—at any rate, I do hope you will not discard poor William for so fanciful a reason."

"No, I will do nothing rashly. For the present, the engagement will remain unbroken, and perhaps, Jane, your prognostic may be fulfilled. But I am not sanguine, and I look upon it almost as a hope that will never be accomplished. For you know, dearest Jane, there

are not many men whose affection will stand the test of a protracted engagement. A deferred marriage is, therefore, little better than an entire breach of the connexion."

"And that," rejoined Jane, "is precisely the reason, why, if I were in your place, I should marry William Beechcroft, in spite of prudence and my Aunt Rebecca."

"But not in defiance of better principles; for, independent of other considerations, you are aware, his parents would not countenance the marriage as we are at present situated."

Jane laughed, "I am afraid my principles would take a lower ground than yours, Charlotte; and I sometimes fancy I should be all the happier for it."

"Hush, hush, I will not hear you say what, I am confident, you do not really think."

But Jane did think it; and, perhaps, so far as this world only carries us, she was not altogether wrong; duty is a very thorny path. But even amidst the briars there are roses to be found, and Charlotte Arnold, in the painful line of conduct she saw herself called upon by duty to pursue, derived support from the con-

viction she was acting right; and that, however William now might chafe and murmur under her decision, the hour would come when he would thank her for the firmness that at present she displayed.

Reader, have you never felt as Charlotte Arnold did? When you have seen the objects, you most fondly prized, by turn removed, has it not seemed to you that your affection brought a blight with it?

THE END OF VOL. II.



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